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OR,

A STILL HUNT for OLD SECRECY.

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"SLEEPLESS EYE," "THE GIANT HORSE-
MAN," "GIT THAR OWNEY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

THE scene a village in Colorado.
Besides the Silver Creek Tavern, where the Leadville stage-coach stopped to change horses every day, there were only some half-dozen houses—rough board shanties—at which were kept the supplies necessary to cowboy existence. It was a bright early morn in May, and a score or so of cowboys were preparing for a round-up.

Work had not yet fully commenced, and the usual frolics, involving skill in the management of horses and in marksmanship, were in full swing.

"Hyar he is! Hyar's the boundin' beauty of the perarie, 'ithout a fly on him, from the top of his nose ter ther last hair in his tail. Whar's the man ez kin ride him for five minutes?"

"LET GO!" DIRECTED THE STRANGER. OLD SECRECY OBEYED MECHANICALLY, AND LEANED OVER TOWARD THE OTHER.

The speaker was a burly fellow in full cowboy equipment—broad sombrero, leather overalls, stout woolen shirt and bare throat. His pistols were ostentatiously displayed in their leather scabbards, and the buckhorn hilt of a bowie-knife peeped from his belt. In his hand he held the cruel-looking "quirt," a sort of blacksnake whip—with which the ponies and cattle are made so familiar on the great cattle-ranges of the West.

"Git on him yerself, ef he's sich a beauty," suggested one of the loungers who stood on the broad veranda of the tavern, carelessly regarding the gyrations of a wicked broncho that the other held by his long lariat, as the horse circled around him.

"No, sir!" was the reply. "Bob Brace has shown what he kin do with er broncho often enough, an' he don't hev to give exhibitions to prove that he kin manage a colt. Now, whar's the man ez'll keep on his back fer five minutes? Durned ef I won't give him the critter ef he kin do it."

He swaggered around as he spoke, and then, glancing into the open door of the tavern, yelled:

"Hyar's ther very man. Bring him out. He's jist er dyin' to git a chance, I kin see. Hold this hyar rope a minnit, Jack, while I bring him out."

He hastily placed the lariat attached to the horse in the hand of the man who had recommended him to ride it himself, and dived into the house.

There was the sound of protesting voices, mingled with Bob Brace's gruff tones; then the cowboy emerged, dragging a white-haired, trembling man whose appearance showed plainly enough, to the most casual eye, that his decrepitude was due more to dissipation than to age.

"Why can't you let me alone, Bob Brace?" he asked piteously. "Why are you boys always anxious to torment me? All I ask is to be allowed to live in my own way, in peace. I can't last much longer, anyhow, and I'm sure I don't want to bother any one, if I can help it."

He wiped his red nose on a handkerchief of the same color, and looked so beseechingly into the face of the cowboy that the other must have been moved to pity had he not been thinking of fun, to the exclusion of everything else.

"Come along hyar, an' quit yer squealin'! I ain't er-goin' ter hurt yer. Hyar he is, boys! Hyar's Old Cap Secrecy, who niver has a dollar but manages ter keep drunk eight days a week all ther year round. I wish I wuz in his business, whatever it is."

The old man frowned and looked furtively into Bob Brace's face, as if something in the other's words had stung him.

"Bring forth the boss! ez ther poet says," yelled Bob. "Jack, help ther gentleman inter ther saddle. How do yer like yer stirrups, Cap, purty short?"

He took the lariat as he spoke, and with a dexterous tug, brought the fiery little broncho to his side.

"Now, Secrecy, up with yer!"

The old man knew by experience that it was useless to resist when the boys had made up their minds to a thing. He placed his left foot in the heavy stirrup, and then, as the horse broke away from Bob Brace, swung himself, with an agility surprising in one so apparently old and decrepit, into the saddle.

Away dashed the horse, the grinning cowboys separating to make room.

The old man stuck to his saddle. He passed close to a man who was swinging his quirt over his head, and snatching the whip from him, cut the horse over the neck as he wheeled him around.

"Durned ef ther old fellow don't ride well," ejaculated Brace. "Didn't think he had that much spunk in his old carcass. See how he fetched that thar little devil of a horse 'round!"

"Will yer give him ther horse ef he sticks on fer ther five minutes?"

"You just bet I will! Bob Brace never went back on his word yet, either to a man or woman. Ef ther old man stays on, ther horse is his—though, by gracious, I'll hate ter lose him."

"So I s'pose," returned Jack, dryly.

"Wal, he ain't been on it fer five minutes yet. Just wait awhile," was Bob Brace's philosophic rejoinder.

Old Secrecy showed that he was anything but a novice in the management of a spirited horse.

Bringing his quirt down on the right side of the broncho's neck, he threw or drew him close to the tavern. Here the horse showed the evil in him by kicking with all his might, and without the least cessation.

Putting his head between his forelegs, and arching his back, he sprang into the air and came down stiff on his four feet, with a succession of jars sufficient to break any ordinary man's spinal column.

"You've lost yer horse, Bob," laughed Jack.

"Stay with him, old man!" yelled two or three in the crowd.

Old Secrecy lashed the horse with his whip and stuck to his saddle as well as he was able, but it was soon apparent that he could not hold out much longer. He had ridden the horse for

nearly ten minutes, and had, therefore, won the animal, according to the declaration of Brace, but, how long he was to be bucked up and down no one could foresee.

The old man had commenced his task with some show of confidence, but now he was beginning to tire, and it would evidently not be long before he would be thrown.

"Don't grab ther leather, Secrecy! Give ther horse some kind er a show!" cried Bob.

Old Secrecy was clinging to the saddle, now, with both hands, and it was evident that his strength was nearly spent.

"R-r-ope him!" he stammered, as he looked entreatingly from right to left.

Jack held his lariat coiled in his hand, and made a motion as if he would throw it at the horse's head and stop the performance.

"Hold on thar, Jack!" yelled Bob Brace. "Ther horse ain't mine no longer, I allow, but he's er goin' ter hev a squar' deal while I'm around, an' I don't propose ter hev him roped jist to save Old Secrecy er tumble."

The young cowboy, Jack Noble, shrugged his shoulders. He had no wish to quarrel with Bob Brace, and, after all, Old Secrecy was of no particular importance to any one. Jack kept his rope in his hand and did not interfere.

Meanwhile, the horse was bucking away as if he never meant to stop.

The poor old fellow on his back, from mere force of habit, retained his seat and plied his quirt, but it was apparent to all that he was utterly exhausted, and that he kept in the saddle solely by good-luck.

The cowboys enjoyed the sport to the utmost.

Used to such rough experiences, they only laughed at every fresh bump suffered by Old Secrecy, and hoped that the entertainment would not come to an end too soon.

The fun was at its height, when, suddenly, a sheepish look stole over the faces of such of the spectators as were facing the door of the tavern, and a desire to slink away could be detected in them.

Bob Brace noticed the discomfiture in the countenances of his companions, and involuntarily turned toward the door.

"What are you doing, men?" demanded a clear voice. "You are in a great business, to be torturing a poor old man, ain't you?"

The speaker was a young girl, not more than eighteen years of age. She wore a dark-blue riding-habit, and from under her jaunty hat hung a mass of golden curls that looked like a flood of sunlight against the somber color of her dress.

She held a stout whip in her hand, and as she spoke, she slashed it across her dress as imperiously as if she were a queen.

"We are only having a little fun!" explained Bob Brace timidly.

The girl looked at him with an expression of disdain that he said afterward made him feel as if he had turned to jelly and was sinking into his boots.

"Father!" she continued, addressing Old Secrecy. "Can't you throw yourself off?"

But it was evident now that the rider of the bucking pony had lost all control, not only of his animal, but of himself, and would never be able to dismount until the buck was reduced to submission by somebody else.

The old man looked toward the young girl who had addressed him as father, but could not answer her.

"Don't be scared, Bob," said Jack Noble, ironically. "Miss Belle won't hurt you, I guess, and you know you wanted your horse to have a show. Well, he's getting it now! Don't you interfere."

The girl looked at Jack, and that young man had nothing further to say. There was a gleam in her eye that meant mischief, and Jack knew it.

"Not a man to help me, eh?" she cried, scornfully. "Well, I can do it myself!"

Springing from the veranda, she dashed at the now maddened horse, and tried to seize the halter rope trailing on the ground.

He tossed his head, snatched the rope from her reach, and dashed across the plain, the old man holding to the saddle with the tenacity of desperation.

The cowboys shrieked with laughter, and two or three of them cut at the horse as it flew past them.

"Cowards!" cried the girl, indignantly.

Her eyes filled with tears, but she dashed them impatiently away with one sweep of her little gloved hand.

She puckered up her rosy lips and emitted a shrill whistle.

A beautiful roan mare, that had been quietly standing at the side of the tavern, trotted around to her, and thrust its velvety nose against her chin.

"Come, Daisy! we must go and help him ourselves. There isn't a man around."

Jack Noble took the disdainful glance that accompanied this speech directly to himself. He ran toward his horse, that stood tethered to a stake out in the open, and was about to mount him, when there was a loud cry of "Clear the way, there!" on the right, and a man on a powerful gray horse galloped forward.

Jack sprang to one side, but, not quickly enough to prevent his being turned completely over by the big gray horse, as his rider dexterously wheeled him after the now maddened broncho, on which hung the almost insensible form of Old Secrecy.

A few bounds of the gray, and he was running neck and neck with the broncho.

The old man's right foot was dangling loose out of the stirrup, as the rider of the gray horse drew up on the left.

"Let go!" directed the stranger.

Old Secrecy obeyed mechanically, and leaned over toward the other.

Both horses were going at full speed, and having described a large circle, were again approaching the Silver Creek Tavern.

The cowboys and the girl were watching the movements of the two horses and their riders with breathless interest.

Suddenly, the stranger on the gray horse threw his right arm around the old man's waist, and with a powerful effort, drew him from the broncho and held him across the saddle of his own mighty steed.

The next minute he had laid Old Secrecy, panting and exhausted, on the veranda at the young girl's feet.

"Father!" she cried, as she sunk on her knees at his side.

"All right, daughter, all right! Where's the horse? I've won him, fair and square!"

As he spoke the broncho, which had stopped, as if dazed, when his rider was pulled from the saddle, came limping toward the tavern, and, with a convulsive shudder, dropped in a heap.

Bob Brace ran over to him, pulled open his mouth, and then, with more genuine feeling than he had yet displayed about the old man or anything else, said, softly:

"Yes, the horse is yours, Secrecy, but he's dead!"

The rider of the gray horse, who had been examining the girths of his saddle, looked up quickly.

"Ridden to death!" was his sententious observation, as he stroked his own horse's neck.

"How can I thank you for saving my father's life?" said the young girl, taking the stranger's hand.

"By saying nothing about it," was his simple response, though a look of pleasure passed over his handsome features at the warmth of the girl's gratitude.

"You are a stranger in this part of the country, I know. What is your name?" she asked, with the directness that is more allowable in the West than in the conventional East.

The stranger, a young man of not more than 25 years of age, with a lithe, well-built form, a laughing face, the firm chin of which, however, denoted an iron determination, bent gravely over the hand that he still held in his own and said:

"At Yale College, my *alma mater*, they called me 'Death-Grip,' but in Colorado I am known as Dick young."

"Death-Grip! Why were you called by such a peculiar name? I am almost afraid of you," exclaimed Belle.

The young man still retained her hand as he answered:

"It arose from a peculiarity of mine. By some occult process that I cannot explain, I can tell, as soon as I grasp a person's hand, whether their acquaintanceship will bring me good or evil. If the latter, they say that I shall surely be present at the person's death, unless I happen to die first."

"Indeed, and pray what will be the result of your having met me?"

"Good, I am sure, but there is a magnetic thrill passing from your fingers to mine that seems to dull my judgment."

The young girl started, and trembling violently, whispered:

"That same magnetism tells me that one or both of us is in danger at this moment! What can it be?"

She looked around her in every direction, and then, recovering her wonted serenity with an effort, exclaimed:

"Pshaw! What absurd superstition!"

But, Death-Grip, following her glance, felt his blood boil, as for one instant he saw, through a small window in the basement of the tavern, the shining barrel of a rifle, with the muzzle pointing directly at him, while behind it a pair of baleful eyes, that might have been those of a wild beast, were fixed upon the hand that had just released that of the young girl.

CHAPTER II.

A RIDE FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

FOR a second the young man stood spell-bound. Then, without saying a word, he ran into the wide open doorway of the tavern, and sought the stairway leading to the basement.

He was evidently well acquainted with the house, for he went straight to a narrow slip of a door in an out-of-the-way corner, which opened upon a steep flight of stairs leading below.

With a bound he went down them and ran to the window at which he had seen the rifle and the wicked eyes.

No one was there, and a glance around the cellar convinced him that he was alone.

"That is strange," he muttered. "I cannot understand how anybody could have got up those stairs without my seeing him, and there is certainly no other outlet."

In spite of his confidence that the stairway afforded the only means of exit from the cellar, Death-Grip took the trouble to examine the place carefully on all sides, on the chance that there might be some opening of which he had hitherto been unaware.

"Nothing but solid wall on all sides! Hum!" Death-Grip was not the man to waste time.

He satisfied himself that his secret foe, whoever he was, had gone away, and then he walked up-stairs again, only just feeling the butt of his six-shooters on either hip to make sure that they were ready in case of emergency.

He found the men all mounted and ready to ride to the round-up, which was to be commenced a few miles away from the village of Silver Creek.

"Come on, Dick. If you're a-goin' to work on this hyar ranch you'll hev to be around in time, now, I'm a-tellin' yer!" yelled Bob Brace. Bob was a foreman, and had a full sense of the importance of his position.

Belle, the daughter of Old Secrecy, stood on the veranda, by her father's side, and watched the busy scene with a longing that she could join in it. Then her gaze fell upon the handsome young stranger, who, in full cowboy costume, and mounted on his gray horse, looked an ideal frontiersman.

"Death-Grip!" she murmured. "Not a very pretty name, but it means something—which is a good thing in a name, after all. Other people may call him Dick Young, but to me he will always be Death-Grip."

She smiled and bowed as Death-Grip wheeled his horse around in front of the veranda, and taking off his broad-brimmed hat, made her a sweeping bow as he passed.

The next instant he was dashing after his companions toward the round-up.

He rode in between Bob Brace and Jack Noble and entered into the conversation that was in progress between them.

"Say, Dick, you've just come from ther East," said Bob. "What do they say 'bout this hyar horse-stealin' in Colorado? Ain't all New York excited about it?"

Bob Brace asked the question in all seriousness. He had been born and raised away from cities, and did not realize that a matter of vital importance to a score of men in Colorado might not rend society from center to circumference on the Atlantic seaboard.

"Well, no, Bob. I haven't heard much said about it; but then New York is a long way off, you know."

"Mebbe, but durned ef I didn't think there ought ter be agitation all over ther country when one or two men kin run off a dozen head of horses every now and then without being caught."

He gave his horse a vicious cut with his quirt as he spoke, and for five minutes had enough to occupy him in keeping the animal within bounds without talking. At last he quieted the ill-tempered brute (who in this case, however, had cause for his obstreperousness), and then he resumed:

"Wal, I understand they are goin' to send a detective or two to help find them fellers. So we may hev a hangin', if the detectives hez any luck. I don't take much stock in Eastern detectives, though. Give me another man besides myself, with nothin' else to do, and I think I could catch them fellers. Durn 'em! They loves horses so much that they hez to take 'em wherever they find 'em, no matter what brand they hez on 'em."

"Why don't you go into the business of catching horse-thieves, then?" asked Death-Grip, quietly.

"I hev er good mind ter."

"So have I!"

All three turned quickly.

The last three words had been uttered by some one else who had ridden up behind them unobserved, and who had evidently been listening to their conversation.

The hand of Death-Grip instinctively sought his pistol.

Glowing from beneath a pent-house of thick, iron-gray brows, with a light that was almost demoniac, were the fierce eyes he had seen through the basement window of the Silver Creek Tavern.

Death-Grip felt sure that he was not mistaken, and yet—one pair of eyes are very much like another.

The owner of the eyes laughed sneeringly as he noted the slight movement of the young man's hand.

"Don't pull yer weapon, stranger. Thar's no one hyar ez needs killin', an' ef thar wuz, I dunno ez you'd be the right man ter do it."

"Whar did you come from, Newt Vorce?" asked Bob Brace, as he drew a little aside, to let the new-comer's horse come between his own and that of Death-Grip.

"From nowhar in particelar."

"Goin' to the same place?"

"Mebbe! I thought ez I'd like a little change, so I kim after you to the round-up."

"Ah!"

All four rode on in silence for a time, during which Dick Young curiously observed the man who answered to the name of Newt Vorce.

He was a person of almost gigantic stature, of perhaps forty years of age. The lower part of his square, hard face was covered with a heavy beard, grizzled and iron-gray, like his eyebrows. His eyes, as has already been said, were remarkably brilliant, and were the most distinguishing feature of a face that was anything but commonplace.

Besides the usual six-shooters and bowie-knife of a cowboy outfit, he had a Winchester repeating rifle swung at his back, and it needed no second look into the keen eyes to assure the young man that Newton Vorce would be ready to use any of his weapons on slight provocation.

"How many horses hev yer lost, Bob?" asked Vorce, after a long pause.

"'Bout twenty head during ther spring, I guess."

"Too many to lose in a few months," commented Vorce. "Hed 'em run right off ther range, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, boys, thar's no time to waste now if we are goin' to bring them thar cattle in," broke in Jack Noble. "See, ther gang's gettin' ready for biz, over thar."

Surely enough the cow-punchers, as cattle-drivers are called sometimes, were riding around furiously, getting the cattle which had already been "trailed" into something like order into a solid mass.

The cowboys, yelling at the top of their voices, sent the frightened animals together.

Here they made a wild dash for a stray steer; there, with a skillful cast of a lariat, they brought an unruly bull to his knees, and drove him back into the herd; anon they brought their quirts down on the haunches of a cow nervous for the safety of her offspring and neglecting all rules as she ran after her calf.

The occupation is an exciting one and every cowboy knows what it is to feel the life-blood dance through his veins and cause a tingling all over his body, as he flies hither and thither in the rush and turmoil of a spring round-up.

Newt Vorce swung his lariat out to its full length and yelled excitedly, as he put spurs to his horse and flew straight into the thick of the fray.

"Rides well, eh?" observed Bob Brace, with the admiration for manly prowess and horsemanship that is a cowboy's religion.

"Yes," grunted Jack Noble, carelessly.

"Has he any other virtues besides his knowledge of riding?" asked Death-Grip, quietly.

"Say, Dick, you hev a way of sizin' a man up thet's almost surprisin'," declared Bob, turning around in his saddle to look in the young man's face.

"It's my business."

"What?"

"Sizin' men up, as you call it."

"Well, for that matter, I s'pose it's everybody's business to see that he gets a squar' deal in life, eh?"

"I suppose so."

"But, es regards Newt Vorce, wal, he's a man ez it's dangerous to fool with. He's loaded with fight cl'ar up ter ther muzzle."

"Yes!"

"An' I'll tell yer another thing, Dick Young, ez you'll do well ter remember—he don't like you!"

"I know it," quietly.

"You do? Wal, then, you are sharper than I giv yer credit for."

"You think you have a monopoly of sharpness, perhaps. Why do you think that he does not like your humble servant?"

"Hev yer noticed Newt's eyes?"

"I have."

"Wal, when he bends them eyes on er man ther way he did on you jist now, it's time fer thet man ter be ready ter shoot at the first sign uv him pullin' a weapon. You onderstand?"

"I understand."

"Wal, now, Dick, take a friend's advice: Don't hold Miss Belle's hand ag'in when you're er-talkin' to her, at least when Newt Vorce kin see yer."

"Ah!"

"Sure ez shootin'. It's sorter made up atween ther old man—Old Secrecy, yer know—an' Newt that he's ter marry Belle."

Death-Grip frowned.

"Impossible!"

"Nuthin' is impossible when Newt Vorce makes up his mind. Now, I've told yer ez er friend. If you don't take no notice uv me, why yer must take ther consequences."

"I will," muttered Death-Grip.

Meanwhile Newt Vorce was circling about the multitude of cattle huddled on the plain some hundreds of yards distant.

"What in thunder is he er-doin'?" exclaimed Brace. "Thar ain't no sense in er man ridin' thet way unless he's doin' some good."

"Some devilry, I guess," observed Noble, as he rode to another part of the scene in a business-like way.

"So he means mischief, does he?" muttered Death-Grip. "All right, Mr. Vorce! Play

your game. Perhaps I may take a strong hand in it myself."

"Look out, Dick!" yelled the voice of Bob Brace just behind him.

Death-Grip turned and saw a long-horned steer, maddened with fury, bearing straight down upon him.

It is nothing unusual for a steer, or even a cow, to charge in this way upon a man, but the young man saw, as he mechanically guided his gray horse out of the way, that he had something more than an infuriated steer to contend with.

Riding like a demon behind the animal, and urging him with yells and pistol-shots straight down on Death-Grip, was Newt Vorce.

In vain the young man wheeled, twisted and turned. Whichever way he went, there was the great head with its long horns, just behind him only a few yards away, and evidently bent on his destruction.

The other cowboys, accustomed to tussles between men and beasts, and opposed on principle to interference with what they considered a fair contest, sat on their horses in the distance, and passively waited for the outcome of the incident.

Newton Vorce laughed fiendishly, as, with his long lariat, he whipped up the steer and turned him this way and that, but always in such a direction as to prevent Death-Grip getting an opportunity to cast his rope and noose the wild beast at his heels.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "I'll get even with you, yer durned tenderfoot! I don't think ez Belle will ever let yer hold her hand ag'in."

On came the steer, like an avenging spirit, with blood-red steam hissing from its nostrils, and rendering the young man sick as it enveloped him.

"If I only had time to wheel around!" thought Death-Grip.

He put extra pressure on his horse as he soliloquized thus.

The gallant gray responded nobly to the signal from his rider, and actually quickened his pace a little.

At the same moment Newt Vorce yelled again and the steer dashed ahead.

The foam splashed Death-Grip's neck, and he cut desperately at his horse with his cruel quirt.

Fatal action!"

The horse bounded from the earth, caught his forefoot against some inequality in the ground, and came to his knees, holding his rider's foot under him as in a vise.

A yell of devilish laughter burst from the lips of Newt Vorce, and Death-Grip, looking over his shoulder, closed his eyes as the points of one of the steer's long horns, sharp almost as a dagger's, came straight to his breast.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOME OF OLD SECRECY.

LONG after the round-up party had ridden away from Silver Creek, the young girl, in her dark-blue riding-habit, stood looking across the plain toward the cloud of dust which showed where the cowboys were riding.

"Belle," said the voice of Old Secrecy, feebly.

"Yes, father."

"Let us go inside the house."

"Why?"

"I think there is somebody who wants to speak to you."

The girl tossed her head disdainfully.

"I suppose you mean Newton Vorce?"

"And if I do?"

"Nothing, except that I do not want to speak to him particularly, and I certainly shall not go into the house to secure the pleasure of his conversation."

"Belle Ormsby, it is my desire that you do not offend this man," said the old man, earnestly.

The girl looked at her father a moment, and then without a word, turned and walked toward the door of the tavern.

Newton Vorce stood in the doorway.

"Never mind, Miss Belle. I heard what you said, an' I won't trouble you with my talk now. But, Grant Ormsby," he added, with a scowl at Old Secrecy, "you know me, an' you know ther contract between us."

Springing upon his horse, that stood quietly near the veranda, he dug his sharp spurs into the animal's sides, and sped after the herding party, without a word of farewell, or taking any further notice of either.

"Curse you, Newt Vorce! You have the best of me now, but, there will surely come a time when I can shake you off and tell you to your teeth the contempt I feel for you."

Old Secrecy shook his fist after the retreating horseman as he uttered these vengeful words, and his daughter saw that his face was flushed and that he absolutely trembled with passion.

"Father!"

"No matter—no matter, my child!" he returned feverishly. "It is all for you—all for you!"

"Yes, yes, father, I know," said Belle, in soothing tones. "Newton Vorce evidently holds a terrorism over you. What it is I do

not know, but I am satisfied that you will escape from his clutches ere long."

"I hope so, with the help of Heaven!" muttered the old man, casting his eyes reverently upward.

Belle took his hand and led him away from the veranda toward a shanty that stood a hundred yards down the primitive street. She called to her horse as she walked away, and the docile animal followed her, without requiring a touch of the bridle.

They stopped in front of the shanty, which bore a rude sign on its front, "Grant Ormsby, horse-shoer and wheelwright." Inside there was a forge, anvil and other paraphernalia of a blacksmith's shop, besides several wheels and pieces of timber that indicated a readiness to repair wagons when necessary.

"Go in, Daisy," ordered Belle, speaking to her roan mare, and the beautiful creature stepped into the shanty and took up its position in one corner where a bed of hay was ready made for it.

Old Secrecy walked straight through into a rear room, which was evidently used as a general living apartment, and threw himself wearily into a wooden rocker, that had been comfortably cushioned by some one.

A look into the face of Belle Ormsby as she hovered over her father was sufficient to show who that somebody was.

"Father, dear, you were not hurt by that horse, were you?"

"No, child, no. A horse cannot hurt me. If a bucking broncho were the only difficulty I had to contend with I should have small cause for complaint."

He sighed heavily and leaned his head on his hands.

"Cheer up, father! I don't like to see you in these despondent moods. I'll get you up a nice breakfast."

He did not answer her, and she, knowing his ways, did not trouble him again.

A little room off that in which he sat was her own sleeping apartment.

She went into it, and in a few minutes came forth an even more radiant picture than when she disappeared.

She had laid aside her dark blue riding-habit and hat, and wore a light cotton dress, inexpensive, but tastefully decorated with ribbons, lace, and the various little adornments that go to make up the attire of a tasteful young girl.

She looked at her father, who still sat in a moody reverie, and then prepared a meal.

"There, father. Now I hope you are hungry, for I think that is a nice breakfast," she said at last, as she poured out a cup of coffee, and showed him that she had steak, eggs, and hot corncakes ready for him.

"I'll try and do justice to it, dear," was the old man's response. "But I'm afraid my appetite is not worthy of your trouble."

He began to eat and Belle left him to attend to the wants of Daisy.

She was pouring some oats into the little bin at her horse's head, when the sudden darkening of the doorway caused her to look up.

"Oh, it's you, Jake Drum?" she said carelessly.

"Yes, Miss Belle, it's only me."

The speaker was a queer-looking object even for a locality where men of all sorts of odd characters and appearance are too common to provoke much comment.

A big head, long body and short crooked legs were his distinguishing characteristics.

The big head looked bigger than it really was on account of being covered with a tangled thatch of frowzy red hair that had probably never been touched by a comb since it began to grow. So thick and plentiful was the hair that a hat would have been a totally unnecessary appendage, and for this reason, perhaps, the owner of the head never wore one.

Thick eyebrows of the same brick-red hue overshadowed a pair of dull blue eyes, which with their red rims, looked as if they never got enough sleep.

The dress of this charming individual was as odd as his personal attributes. It was of the fashion worn by boys of ten or eleven years of age. Knee pants, woolen stockings and low shoes, with a woolen shirt waist, completed his attire, if we except a very bright red ribbon around his neck, under his lay-down collar, and tied in a neat double bow. This red ribbon was Jake's one weakness. He had somehow come into possession of a quantity of red ribbon some years before, and Belle had playfully offered to make him a necktie. She cut off a piece of the ribbon and tied it around his neck. From that moment he was impressed with the beauty of the arrangement, and had worn a red ribbon necktie ever since, getting a new clean piece of ribbon from his store whenever Belle had warned him that the old piece was becoming too much soiled for a gentleman's wear.

How old Jake Drum might be it was impossible to say with certainty, but a shrewd guess would place his age at about thirty-five.

He had been with Old Secrecy ever since Belle could remember, and she treated him more like a faithful dog than anything else.

"Where have you been, Jake?" she asked.

"I was taking Mr. Vorce's horse over to the hotel."

"I didn't see you."

"Maybe not. I was just looking around a little."

"Jake, you were wasting your time, I'm afraid. You are a lazy boy."

"Am I, Miss Belle? Well, perhaps I am. I never thought of that before," returned Jake, humbly, as he tied on a leather apron and commenced to blow up the forge fire.

Inasmuch as Belle was accustomed to tell him every day that she was afraid he was lazy, it was rather strange that he had never thought of it before, but he always returned the same answer to her remark.

He soon had the fire burning brightly, and went to work at making horseshoes in the matter-of-fact way of one thoroughly used to his employment.

"Belle, I am going into the laboratory," said her father at last.

"Very well, father."

The old man went to a corner of his room, and, taking a key from an inner pocket, unlocked a large, iron-bound chest.

When the lid was raised it revealed nothing but a few old books and papers scattered carelessly about in the spacious interior.

Old Secrecy fumbled among these books, and finally selecting one that appeared to be an old Directory of New York City, opened it and fluttered its leaves through his fingers.

He sighed heavily as he did so. A stranger might have wondered what there could be in such an unsentimental volume as a Directory to draw a sigh from a sensible man.

He fluttered the leaves for a few seconds, and then, after looking cautiously around him, held the book open at a place where several of the old, time-stained leaves were stuck together.

"Belle, there is no one in the shop, is there?" he asked.

"No one but Jake, father."

"Well, see that the middle door is fastened."

"It is, father. You know I always attend to that when you are going to the laboratory."

"Yes, yes, child. You are a good girl," returned Old Secrecy, as he held the leaves of the Directory between his fingers.

Then he partially separated those that adhered, and drew forth a small flat steel key of the Yale pattern.

"Ah, my beauty! You are the sentinel of wealth that would be my death if its existence were known to nine-tenths of the men in this neighborhood," he muttered, adding, with another sigh, "and that will doubtless put me in a dishonored grave anyhow."

"Father, did you have a good breakfast?" asked Belle. "You do not seem at all well today. I would not work now, if I were you."

"I must, child, I must. The cause of science cries for constant attention. I am well—very well, and I had a good breakfast, thanks to my little girl."

He patted her cheek as he spoke, and then, with another sigh, went back to the heavy, iron-bound chest. Leaning over, he put the small key into an almost imperceptible hole in a corner of the interior, clearing away some of the rubbish and dust to get at it.

One turn of the key, and the whole bottom of the box flew up, showing a dark hole beneath.

The box-bottom was nothing more than the door of a subterranean passage!

"Good-by, Belle, for an hour or two," said Old Secrecy, as he lifted the bottom up and stepped into the hole.

"Good-by, father!"

She kissed him, and the next moment, Old Secrecy had disappeared, the box-bottom dropping into its place, with a click that betokened a spring fastening.

Belle shut down the heavy lid of the chest, which was also secured by a spring lock. The old man had both the keys that he had used in his pockets.

CHAPTER IV.

JAKE DRUM IN THE NICK OF TIME.

WHEN Old Secrecy closed the trap-door after him he found himself in pitch darkness.

He was standing on a rude ladder that might have led to the very center of the earth for all that could be distinguished in the Erebus-like gloom.

But Old Secrecy knew just where he was and where he would be when he got off the ladder. So he coolly descended some half-dozen steps and then, his feet touching a hard, rocky floor, walked boldly forward.

A dozen yards or so, and his progress was checked by a door. He placed his hand upon it and fumbled about until he found a slight inequality in the wood near the floor. This he pressed and the door opened.

He passed quickly through, closing the door after him. The new apartment, or passage, was as dark as that he left.

Another dozen yards and then another door, which he opened in the same way as the first.

Now a dull hazy light showed the sort of place he was in. It was a passage apparently

hewn through the solid rock, not more than six feet wide, and perhaps seven or eight in height.

Where the light came from was not very clear at first, but a little closer examination showed fissures in the roof, that evidently had indirect communication with the outer world.

The passage wound a good deal, and was of considerable length—a quarter of a mile, at least. How or by whom it had been excavated it was hard to conjecture. The most feasible explanation was that it had been formed by some convulsion of nature, and had been fashioned to suit the purpose to which it was now applied, by the hand of man, afterward.

At last the passage came to an end, apparently without any outlet, nothing but the solid rock at the end and sides.

Old Secrecy knew better, however.

He placed his hand in a crack—irregular and crumbling, such as might have been caused by the mere settling of the earth at some period when the rock itself was only clay—and pulled sharply.

A large section of the rock swung from its place, revealing an opening into a large chamber—the laboratory.

Old Secrecy stepped inside and pulled the movable rock into its place.

"So! Safe once more," he muttered. "But how long am I to remain under this man's thrall? I am weary of life—weariness—weariness!"

With a heavy sigh, he began to move about the room.

A small furnace, melting-pots, crucibles, molds, and other things of like nature scattered about the room would have awakened the suspicions of any intelligent stranger, even if Old Secrecy had not, by his habit of thinking aloud, revealed the business to which this secret apartment was devoted.

"Grant Ormsby, counterfeiter. That would sound well, wouldn't it? What would Belle say if she knew that her father was systematically engaged in defrauding the United States Government? She would have a high opinion of him then, wouldn't she?"

He laughed a mirthless, harsh laugh.

"She, who supposes that her father, drunken, shiftless, if you will, is with it all the soul of honesty and honor!"

He stooped, by a sudden impulse, and picking up a ladle from the floor, dashed it against the wall.

"Oh, Newton Vorce—Newton Vorce, were it not for the cursed hold you have upon me, I would try and reform, even now!"

Sighing and shaking his head, he went to work.

He lighted a fire in the furnace, and soon was busy making dollars from the cunningly-devised mixture of base metals that had enabled him to flood hundreds of square miles of territory with spurious money.

So excellent was the imitation that only experts were able to detect them.

A slight greasiness to the touch and a little deficiency in weight were the only peculiarities that distinguished Old Secrecy's dollars from those turned out by the United States mints.

The authorities had long been puzzling over the matter, and had at last traced the manufactory of the fraudulent money to Colorado. There their knowledge ended. Who was the maker and where he operated were still mysteries to the detectives employed on the case.

The room was lighted in the same way as the passage, viz., by fissures in the roof and high up in the walls. A heavy iron door opposite that of rock by which the old man had entered, and which, when closed, was invisible, was the only means of egress to be seen.

For hour after hour Old Secrecy worked away. As he completed each batch of dollars he laid them on one side to cool. Then he made them up in neat packages of 10 and 20, marking each one on the paper covering with the number it contained.

So absorbed was he in his work that he took no note of the flight of time until the packages represented an aggregate of many hundreds of dollars.

Then he glanced up at a little clock that hung over the bench at which he worked, and saw that it was six o'clock in the evening.

"Um! Pretty near time Jake was here," he muttered. "I want him to help me get this stuff away. I told him not to be later than seven o'clock."

He turned out another batch of coins from their molds, and, while they cooled, placed the packages completed in a basket. Over the packages he strewed some potatoes, so that to a casual observer the basket would appear to contain potatoes, and nothing else.

Suddenly, three knocks thundered through the apartment.

"There he is at last!"

It would be impossible for a stranger to tell where the knocks had been administered. The peculiar formation of the place had caused them to reverberate so that they sounded as if they were on every side.

Old Secrecy, however, knew better. He went straight to the iron door, and tapped lightly with his knuckles.

The result of each tap was similar to that of

the knocks before mentioned. Though he tapped as lightly as he could, his knuckles sent a tremendous noise echoing through the room.

His tap was answered in the same manner from the other side, and while yet the confused echoes were thundering about his ears, he opened the door.

"Well?"

"The word was put in the form of a question, and was as gruff as a word could be.

"Newton Vorce?" gasped the old man, starting back.

"Yes, Newton Vorce," returned the man who stood in the doorway. "Why not?"

"Nothing, only I didn't expect to see you tonight. I thought you had gone along with the cow-punchers for a little sport."

"Did yer? Wal, yer see, yer was mistaken. I thought I would come 'round hyar, and see whether my partner was a-earnin' the right to be alive, d'ye see?"

"Oh, yes, I see."

"Wal, don't repeat my words, 'cause I don't like it, an' when Newton Vorce don't like a thing, he's liable to be ugly."

The speaker touched the butt of his six-shooter significantly as he spoke.

Old Secrecy did not reply. He barred the door and busied himself in packing his last batch of dollars, while Vorce unslung his Winchester rifle from his shoulder, and, throwing himself upon a rude bench, watched his companion from underneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Which way did you come, Newt?" asked Old Secrecy, at last.

The other did not deign to reply immediately. He was evidently out of humor.

"Did you see anything of Jake?" queried Old Secrecy.

"No," shortly.

"He was to be here to-night for this stuff."

"Was he?"

"Yes."

"Wal, he'd better come, or there'll be trouble for him."

"Oh, he'll come," assured the old man, cheerfully. "He never neglects his business."

"He'd better not."

"What's the matter, Newt? You don't seem to feel very good to-day."

"See here, Secrecy," answered Vorce, turning around on his stool and looking full into his companion's face. "I do not feel good, and unless you can explain certain matters away you will not either."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. Are you going to keep your contract with me?"

"Why, of course I am."

"Do you think you are acting squar' with me?"

"I am trying to."

"Trying?"

Newt Vorce spoke with an accent of ineffable contempt.

"Yes, trying, Newt Vorce. No man can do more than that."

"But there are different ways of trying."

"Yes."

"And I don't think you are trying very hard."

"But, Newt—"

"Don't interrupt me. You promised that I should have Belle, didn't yer?"

"Yes."

"Wal, hev I got her?"

"Not yet, perhaps, but you will."

"Pshaw! How will I? Any one kin see she hates ther sight of me, an' I stand as much chance of marrying her as I do of bein' President of the United States."

"But, Newt—"

"Shet yer big mouth. Now, you promised thet you would fix it so ez she would think I wuz the finest man ez she ever see, didn't yer?"

"Yes, but—"

"An' you hev'n't done it, hev yer?"

"I have done all I could."

"All yer could—yes, an' thet's er great deal, ain't it? Wal, I've made up my mind ter one thing, an' I've come now to tell yer. Ef I don't git Belle's word ez she'll marry me afore I'm two weeks older I'll shet down on yer, sure."

"Why, you don't mean—"

"Yes, I do mean. I mean ez I'll give yer up ter justice for thet job of yours in Chicago three years ago, an' I'll pocket ther \$3,000 reward ez nice ez pie."

The old man trembled violently.

"But, Newt, you know I didn't mean ter kill that man, and you always promised that you would never reveal what you knew about it."

"Pr'aps I did promise, an' pr'aps I'd ha' kept my word ef you'd 'a' kept yours. But you haven't. You've let Belle make the acquaintance of every loafer that has come around Silver Spring, an' ther consens is that she don't keer a darn fer Newt Vorce."

Old Secrecy drew himself up with dignity. "Newt Vorce, my daughter does not associate with loafers."

"Don't she? What d'ye call that feller, Dick Young—or Death-Grip, ez some call him?"

"I don't know anything about him, but he doesn't strike me as a loafer."

"Wal, thar is enough uv this hyar gab. You

know what I mean ter do. I give yer two weeks to make Belle come to her senses. Ef yer don't do it by thet time, why look out."

The old man had finished his packages, and stood nervously twitching his fingers as the other spoke.

Vorce arose from his stool and picked up his Winchester with a cruel smile playing around his lips.

"Wal, you've heerd my ultermartum," he said as he stepped up to the bench and fingered some of the packages.

Old Secrecy stood still, as if stunned.

Suddenly, with a cry like that of a wounded wild beast at bay, he sprung at Vorce's throat, and with a tremendous effort bore him to the ground.

"Yes, curse you! I have heard it, and I defy you. Say a word to the police about me, and where will you be? You, Newton Vorce, the counterfeiter and horse-thief—"

He stopped speaking, for his antagonist, with three times the strength of Old Secrecy, had released himself from the latter's grasp, and had closed his cruel fingers on the old man's throat.

There was vindictive hate in the desperado's eyes, and it was evident that he meant murder.

"You've gone too far this time," he hissed.

"I'll never get the \$3,000, but I'll put you out of the way, and hev Belle anyhow."

"Mer—mercy!" gurgled his victim.

"Yes, I'll hev marcy. I'll—"

He was tightening his fingers with a smile of demoniac fury, when—there was a crash as the Winchester rifle that he had thrown aside came down with fearful force upon his head and he lay senseless by the side of the man he would have slain.

"Jake Dunn was just in time for once," said a queer, croaking voice, as a large face under a thatch of red hair was turned mockingly toward the insensible form of the desperado.

CHAPTER V.

A SLIPPERY CUSTOMER.

WHEN the cowboys saw the imminent peril of Death-Grip from the horns of the steer, they involuntarily reined in their horses and waited breathlessly for the outcome.

When Death-Grip's horse stumbled and pinned his rider to the ground, it seemed as if nothing could save him.

As for the young man himself he had to think and act quickly. He almost felt the hot breath of the maddened animal on his cheek, and heard the furious yelling of Vorce just behind him.

On came the steer, tossing his head in triumph as he saw his intended victim prostrated.

He made a desperate lunge at the young man as he lay helpless, but—missed him.

At the critical moment Death-Grip had managed to swerve to one side, and the long horn that was meant for his heart, grazed his side and plunged into the earth instead.

The young man was between the two horns of the steer, and was held as firmly as if chained to the ground.

The animal bellowed and pawed, but could not release himself. His two horns had dug deep into the earth, taking a diagonal direction, so that he was, as it were, wedged into the earth.

Vorce spurred his horse up to the steer and struck it with his quirt with all his force.

The result was to make the animal kick and struggle wildly, but without effecting his release.

Half a dozen cowboys came galloping up.

"By gum, he's got a death-grip on yer this time," laughed Bob Brace.

"Crawl out from under him," suggested Jack Noble.

A burst of laughter from the other cowboys followed this sally. They saw that their companion was in no immediate danger now, and their habit of looking at the ludicrous side of everything, completely stifled any sympathy they might have had for the unfortunate Death-Grip.

"Rope him, boys," suggested Brace. "Ther only thing ez I kin see is ter pull him off by main strength."

"Thet's ther only way," acquiesced Noble, as he sent the slip-knot of his lariat at one skillful cast over the head of the steer. He could not put it around the horns, of course, because they were imbedded in the earth, but he tightened the knot so that it had a firm grasp on the forehead of the beast.

"Why not shoot the critter, an' then we could get ther man out afterwards? I'll do it. I'll fix him with the first shot," said Newt Vorce.

He unslung his Winchester as he spoke, and pointed it at the head of the steer.

"Hold on thar, Newt! Thet's a little too dangerous. Suppose you were to miss ther steer an' hit ther man! You might do it, yer know."

There was a significant ring in Bob Brace's voice, as he thus spoke, that the desperado understood, for he gritted his teeth as he sulkily replaced his rifle and turned away.

Under the supervision of Bob Brace a number of ropes were thrown around the steer's legs, and he was as helpless as a trussed chicken.

Death-Grip lay quietly watching the operations, and occasionally throwing in a suggestion or two as to the disposition of this or that rope.

Cool and courageous, he was not the man to make a fuss because he found himself in an awkward situation.

Vorce sat on his horse at a little distance, motionless as a statue, watching the proceedings, but without offering to assist.

"Now, Dick, ez soon ez we pull on ther ropes I think you'd better git out of that," said Bob Brace.

"Good advice doubtless, but my foot is under the horse," answered Death-Grip, good-humoredly.

"Cesar! I forgot that. D'ye think yer foot is hurt?"

"I guess not, but I can't get it out."

"We'll soon fix that. Here, boys, give me a lift with this hyar horse."

A dozen willing hands raised the noble gray slightly, and his owner withdrew his foot.

"It is not hurt," he announced, as he turned his foot this and that way. "Only a little stiff."

The steer, pretty well exhausted by its struggles, lay quiet now, and did not seem to care what became of it.

"Now, Dick, remember. Don't stay thar a minute longer than you hev ter," admonished Brace.

"I certainly shall not."

"Very well. Now, boys, all together!"

There was a sudden tightening of the ropes, as each man, holding his own lariat, sent his horse at full gallop away from the steer, throwing him back almost on his haunches as he reached the full tension of the rope.

"Look out, boys!" yelled the foreman.

The concerted pull on the ropes had released the long horns, and the steer was rolling on his back.

At the same moment Death-Grip and his gray horse both sprung to their feet and got away from the flying feet and tossing head of the steer.

"Thet's all right. Let him lie thar and kick for a while. It won't hurt him," remarked the philosophical Bob Brace.

"Boys, I thank you," said Death-Grip, as he mounted his gallant gray and circled around to take the stiffness out of both his horse and himself.

"Shut yer mouth, will yer?" was Bob's gruff response. "Durned ef you ain't ther worst kind uv er tenderfoot in some ways."

"Why?"

"Thanking ther boys fer helpin' yer out uv a scrape. When you've been in Colorado a year or two longer you'll know better than that."

In fact, the young man had committed a breach of cowboy etiquette in regarding the assistance that had been tendered him as anything but a matter of course.

He turned around laughing from Bob Brace's sermon to look for Newton Vorce. The young man desired a word or two with the gentleman.

But he was disappointed. The man who had so nearly caused his death was no longer in the neighborhood, but a speck in the midst of a cloud of dust in the distance showed that he was making the best of his way in the direction of Silver Spring.

"Never mind, you ruffian! We shall meet again," muttered Death-Grip, as he prepared to follow his companions.

The steer had been brought to subjection, and was already being driven toward the herd.

The young man rode between Bob Brace and Jack Noble, neither of them speaking for a few minutes. Then Brace, leaning over to Death-Grip, said something to him in a low tone of voice.

The young man started.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked, eagerly.

"Ez sure as we are here."

Without another word Death-Grip wheeled his horse and rode at full speed in the direction taken by Vorce a few minutes before.

"What's bitten him now?" asked Jack Noble, carelessly, as he looked after the flying horseman.

"Biz of some kind, I guess," was his companion's quiet reply.

Meanwhile Death-Grip was urging his horse to the utmost speed.

"So Newt Vorce, it is as I suspected. You are the man I want," soliloquized the young man, as his powerful gray bore him swiftly through the bracing air. "You are the individual who is suspected of running off horses as well as of other crimes. Well, I am glad you are the man. I should have been sorry to learn that you were an honest man and a good citizen, for I don't like you, Newton Vorce. You have tried to play dirty tricks on me, and I want to make you regret them. Detective Officer Richard Young will work all the better on this case because Death-Grip has a wrong to avenge at the same time."

He smiled slightly as he took from a secret pocket in his shirt a silver badge and an official paper with an imposing red seal.

"Yes, here they are! All safe! It may be necessary for me to produce these things to prove my identity before I get through with

this job. A detective can never be too careful when his business brings him into the far West. I suppose I shall have a little trouble with this fellow, but I don't mind that. I'll corral him at last, or my name isn't Dick Young."

The young man here stopped thinking aloud, but a gentle smile playing around his eyes would have indicated that his thoughts were still on a pleasant subject, even had not his unconscious utterance of the name "Belle" once or twice given a clue to the direction of his reflections.

"Well, well, well, young man, where to now? Are you going to ride clear into the house?" cried a pleasant feminine voice, as Death-Grip, with some difficulty, reined up his gray at the door of the Silver Creek Tavern.

"Not exactly, Miss Vorce; but Raker never likes to stop till he gets to the end of his journey."

"None of your back-talk or I'll crack you over the head with a skillet."

The speaker, smiling cheerily, came out on the veranda, and looked the horse over with the eye of a critic as the young detective dismounted.

She was a red-cheeked, handsome damsel, of perhaps thirty years of age, with but little in her countenance to betoken that she was the sister of Newton Vorce, the desperado. Such was her relationship, however, though her disposition was as sunny as his was saturnine.

She had been keeping the Silver Creek Tavern for some years, and in an orderly, respectable manner. The rough men who were her patrons knew that Susan Vorce (or Susie, as she was always called), was quite able to conduct her business in her own way, and that, in spite of her good-nature, she had a deadly finger on the trigger of a revolver, and would shoot as soon as speak.

"Miss Vorce, I am sure I would not be guilty of giving you back-talk if I knew it."

"Miss Vorce!" repeated the other impatiently, as she mimicked the young man's voice. "Don't you know that my name is Susie? Other people around here are not too high-toned to call me by it."

"Nor am I, Susie. But I thought you might consider it a liberty from a stranger."

"I am able to take care of myself, and I'm not afraid of any man taking liberties with me. But what are you after, riding up here like the very deuce?"

"Have you seen your brother lately?"

"My brother, did you say?"

Susie's red cheeks grew a trifle pale as she asked the question, evidently for the sake of gaining time.

"Yes. He rode away from me toward the tavern, and I supposed he had come here."

"Well, if you think he is here, you had better look for him."

Susie spoke in a short, snappy manner, entirely different to that with which she had first greeted the young man.

"He is here somewhere, and she doesn't want to betray him," was Death-Grip's inward comment, as he looked straight into the eyes of Susan Vorce.

"Very well, Susie," he said aloud. "I will avail myself of your permission and take a look around. I want to transact some business with your brother."

He did not dismount, but simply guided his horse around the side of the rambling building.

There were plenty of hoof-tracks about, but they proved nothing, because before the cattle-party started in the morning there had been scores of horses trampling the ground in the neighborhood of the Silver Creek Tavern.

Death-Grip kept his eyes on the ground notwithstanding.

Suddenly, as he reached the extreme rear of the building, he uttered a slight cry of triumph and leaped from his saddle.

"Yes, here they are," he muttered. "Ah, Newt Vorce, you did not know that I was so well informed with regard to your peculiarities. Here is the track of your horse, fresh too."

He stooped down and examined the mark of a horseshoe close to the house. It was of a rather unusual shape. It covered only three-quarters of the usual size of a shoe, the other fourth, at the back of the heel, on the right side, being missing. It was the off hind foot, as any experienced horseman could tell at a glance.

"Now, where can he be, and where is his horse? No use asking his sister, of course. I'll just step into this back door leading to the cellar. He may be down here. I'll find him today, as sure as my name is Dick Young."

The young man drew his six-shooter, and examined it to make sure that it was ready for action.

He had gone only three or four steps down into the cellar, and was waiting until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, when his feet were knocked from under him by a terrific blow on his shins, and Newt Vorce's voice yelled:

"Take that, you sneaking tenderfoot, and when you take your supper to-night, thank Newt Vorce that you have a head to put yer grub into."

Death-Grip's reply was to send shot after

shot in the direction of the voice, but with no effect save to provoke a paroxysm of mocking laughter from the desperado.

"Man or devil, I'll have you this time," shouted the detective, as he regained his feet and dashed across the cellar.

He came with tremendous force against the solid stone wall, but not a sign of human being could he find anywhere in the place, though he searched every corner.

He was sure that Vorce could not have escaped by either doors or windows into the open air, and yet not another door or outlet of any kind could he find from one end of the cellar to the other.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIDNIGHT MOUNTAIN HAG.

A DAY had passed since the events narrated in the preceding chapters.

In the front apartment—the blacksmith shop—of Old Secrecy's shanty were Belle Ormsby and Susie.

"You haven't seen your father or Jake Drum since yesterday, eh, Belle?" Susie was saying.

"No; father went to the laboratory in the morning, and has not been back, and in the evening Jake went away, too."

"Why don't you go to the laboratory? You know where it is, I suppose?"

"No—yes— Well, I would not dare to go. It would make father very angry."

"Well, but, bless the girl! Suppose he should be sick, or something. If he was my father I would go, and take my chances on his being angry."

Susie shook her head in a determined way, and it was easy to see that she meant what she said with all her heart.

"Susie, you are wanted over at the hotel," announced a boy, who was the lady's factotum at Silver Creek Tavern.

"All right. I'm coming."

She arose from her seat at once, and with another shake of her head for Belle's benefit, ran across to the tavern.

Hardly had she disappeared when Newton Vorce entered the shanty and stood before Belle Ormsby.

"Belle, I've come for my answer," was his greeting, in gruff accents.

"You have it already," returned the girl, as she walked up to the head of her horse standing quietly in her corner with her nose in her box of oaths.

"You mean that you refuse me?"

"Most certainly."

Newt Vorce looked at her for a few seconds with an expression on his face that he tried in vain to make a pleasant one.

Then he took a neatly folded silk handkerchief from his pocket, and held it out to her.

"Well, Belle, we can still be friends, even if you will not marry me. I thought p'raps you wouldn't hev me, but I brought you this hyar handkercher ez a little keepsake, anyhow. I hed it brought from Denver, especially for you."

Belle hesitated. She did not want to take anything from the hands of this man. And yet, her father had told her more than once of some mysterious power that Newton Vorce held over him, and for her father's sake, she would not quarrel.

"Thank you, Mr. Vorce, I will take the handkerchief," she said, at last.

He stepped close to her. She put out her hand for the handkerchief. Ere her fingers could close upon it, however, he suddenly threw his left arm around her waist and threw her back, while with his right he pressed the handkerchief firmly over her nose and mouth.

"Help!" she screamed once.

"Curse you. Hold your noise, or I'll choke the life out of you, right hyar!" hissed the villain in her ear.

The one scream was all that she could utter.

Tighter and tighter was the treacherous handkerchief held over her nostrils, while the chloroform with which it was impregnated crept around her brain, and forced itself with deadly subtlety into the very nerve-centers of her being.

"Double-strength! That's the stuff, my lady. It will soon fix you," muttered Vorce.

Sure enough, in a remarkably short time the girl lay back in his arms utterly unconscious.

He gave a low whistle.

On the instant his own horse, a very large and powerful black beast, put his head in the doorway.

"Stay there, Demon. I kin bring her out."

The horse seemed to know what his master said, for he coolly turned himself around, so as to present his side to the doorway.

Taking the helpless form of the unconscious girl in his strong arms, Newton Vorce walked to the head of Daisy, and led her out by the side of the black horse.

"Guess we'll take you along, 'cause when she comes 'round we shall hev to make her ride by herself. I'm glad she has her riding-habit on. It will be all the more comfortable for her."

He looked cautiously up and down the rude "street," and saw that it was entirely empty.

"The devil always takes care of his own, by gosh!" he muttered, "an' I suppose that's ther reason ez Newt Vorce allers comes out on top. Now, my gal, off she goes!"

He put his right foot in the stirrup, and still holding Belle in his arms, vaulted into the saddle on Demon's back.

"Say, there, you Newt. What are you doing?" cried Susie's voice, as that lady appeared on the veranda of the Silver Creek Tavern, in an attitude of intense astonishment and dismay.

"Mind yer own business!" returned Newt, gruffly, as he put spurs to his horse.

Demon bounded forward under his double burden, Daisy moving with him and keeping close by his side.

"Say, Newton Vorce, I tell you to stop," cried Susie, warningly.

"Oh, yer do? Wal, git in thar an' tend ter yer business. I know what I hev ter do," yelled her brother, as he slashed Demon with his whip.

"Will you stop?"

"Go to—"

Bang! Bang!

Two shots from Susie's revolver!

One went through the hat and the other grazed the shoulder of the reckless fellow who was urging the black horse to the top of his speed.

Half a dozen bounds of the horse and he was out of range of his sister's weapon.

"I'll make it hot fer you when I do git back, mind," he bawled, as he dashed away.

"Yes, and I'll make it hot for you, right now," was his sister's response, as she emptied the discharged shells from her revolver, and put in new cartridges. "I could have hit him as easily as not if I had wanted to," she muttered to herself, "but I can't forget that his father was mine, bad as he is. However, he isn't going to do just as he likes, if he were a thousand times my brother. Belle Ormsby is too good a girl for him."

She went slowly into the tavern, in deep thought.

Meanwhile Demon dashed along, seeming in his immense strength hardly to notice that he carried more than one rider.

The town of Silver Creek was cleared, and after passing a mile or two over the level plain, Vorce turned his horse up a mountain path.

"I must get to the dug-out before morning," he muttered. "Then I kin laugh at the whole crowd. I wonder ef this hyar gal isn't er comin' to."

He looked into Belle's face, and saw signs of returning consciousness.

"I dunno whether ter give her a little more of this hyar stuff, an' keep her a-sleepin', or whether ter make her ride her own hoss. I'm kinder afeard ez Demon may give out afore we git thar, ef I don't ease him a little."

A look at Daisy, who still galloped contentedly at his side, determined him.

"It's er durned shame ter let thet thar horse run along without nothin' on his back, while Demon's er-carryin' us both. I'll risk it."

He knew that Belle always carried a pretty silver-mounted derringer, as well as a pearl-handled bowie-knife, and that she would not be backward in using both if necessity arose.

He saw the butt of the revolver in her belt, and soon possessed himself of it.

"Now, whar's ther knife?"

But this question was not so easily answered. It was not in her belt, and she had apparently no other place to carry it.

"Guess she hasn't got it about her. Don't car' very much ef she has. A knife ain't dangerous in the hands uv er gal."

"Where am I?" gasped Belle, faintly.

"Oh, you are all right. You're jist takin' er ride for the benefit uv yer health," said the desperado, in as soothing a voice as he could assume.

"Oh, yes, I remember now. Newton Vorce—"

"Precisely, at your sarvice."

"You wretch!" said Belle, as, under the influence of the bracing air and the swift motion the fumes of the drug were rapidly dispelled from her brain. "Stop this horse and let me go."

"I can't stop ther horse, Miss Belle, because we ain't reached ther end of our journey yet; but I'll let yer git on Daisy, if you'll promise not to play smart on me."

"Daisy!" cried the girl, joyfully. "Where is she? Where is she?"

"Right beside us."

"Oh, yes, Daisy! Daisy!"

Daisy squeezed close to the side of the black horse and turned her velvety nose toward her mistress.

"Now, Belle, listen to me. I'm going ter take you up hyar into ther mountains for a few days. You won't be injured or treated with disrespect in any way. But you'll hev to stay—"

"You wretch!"

"Sart'lnly! Anything ez you say goes. Any-way, you'll hev ter stay."

"Never!"
"Oh, yes yer will, so you needn't kick. Ef yer don't believe what I say, let me tell yer that I hev a letter from yer old dad ter yer tellin' yer to do ez I tell yer."

"You lie!"
"What's thet? You shouldn't use sich words ez thet ter a gentleman. It don't sound lady-like. Ef yer don't believe me, I'll show yer ther letter. I guess it's light enough for yer to see ter read it."

Still holding the girl securely with his left arm, he felt in one of his pockets and brought out a letter, which he opened with the aid of his teeth and held in front of Belle's eyes.

In the large, scrawling writing that she recognized at once as her father's, the girl read:

"My DAUGHTER:—Newton Vorce may want you to accompany him to-night. Go with him without question. Your father's life may depend upon your action. Your affectionate father."

"GRANT ORMSBY."

"Heavens! What does this mean?" was the girl's half-unconscious exclamation.

"It means jist what it says. Yer dad an' I hev business ter attend ter, an' I tell yer straight that I know things about him ez 'u'd put a rope around his neck ef I was to talk."

"You?"
"Yes—I. But I like ther old man an' I won't do it. But, by Caesar, you've got ter do ez I say."

"What do you want me to do?"
"Jist git on your mare, and ride along with me. Ez I told yer afore, you won't be hurt, but I want you ter come."

"And if I refuse?"
"Then, I swear ez I'll tie yer on yer horse with this hyar lariat and take yer along anyhow. Now, make up yer mind, right quick."

All through the foregoing dialogue Demon kept along at a steady gallop, with Daisy at his side, moving stride for stride with him.

"I'll do as you say," whispered the girl, at last.

"Sure?"
"Did you ever know me to break my word?"
"Wal, no. But, yer see, Belle, this hyar is a mighty partickler business, an' I wouldn't want any slip up on it, don't yer see?"

"There will not be any slip up, as you call it, by any action of mine," returned Belle, quietly.

Vorce did not speak. He pulled Demon to a standstill, and allowed Belle to drop to her feet on the ground.

The next minute she was on the back of her equine favorite, who as soon as she felt Belle's guiding hand on the bridle, led the pace for the big black horse, as if exulting in the freedom of a gallop over mountain and plain.

"Clear grit in thet thar gal. Durned ef thar ain't!" muttered Newt, to himself. "By gosh! I'll hev her, ef I hev ter reform an' go back ter plug hats and store clothes, in old Connecticut for her sake."

The path up which they were galloping was getting narrower now. They had followed the wagon-trail for a considerable distance, but at Vorce's direction, had turned off to a mere foot trail up the side of the mountain, with a steep rocky wall on their right and a sheer precipice of some 2,000 feet on the left.

"Better be keeful goin' up hyar, Belle. Ef that horse of yours was to stumble you'd get a fall that 'u'd jar yer like sixty."

"I am careful," answered Belle, briefly.

There was a contemptuous ring in the girl's tones that stung her companion. The bare intimation that he was afraid of anything would have cost Belle her life had she been a man. As it was he could do nothing but grit his teeth and make an inward vow to get even with her in some way in the future.

"Hallo! Hallo! Git up thar! Look out! Hyar I come—five hundred strong, and full of thunder and lightning, clear up to the muzzle! Look out for me! Clear the track! Clear the track!"

In wild, weird, falsetto tones these words echoed and re-echoed over and around the mountains.

"What is it?" whispered Belle, awe-struck as her horse recoiled in affright at the strange sounds.

"Look out for me, there, I say, Newt Vorce, for I'm coming down on you. I'm the devil of the Rockies, and I hold the mountains in my grasp."

Again the fearful voice, but no one to be seen.

Vorce was no coward, but his blood ran cold as he heard the mysterious denunciation. It had become very dark, night coming on apace, as it always does in the rare atmosphere of Colorado, without any twilight, while the premonitory rolling of thunder added to the supernatural solemnity of the scene.

"Look, Vorce, it is coming right down upon us!" shrieked Belle in an agony of terror, as her horse reared backward.

A tall female figure, with long white hair, a pale face, and fierce, blazing eyes, stood right in her path, pointing one long finger at Newton Vorce, as a blue flash of forked lightning played around her head, making her look in very truth like a visitant from the other world.

CHAPTER VII.

DEATH-GRIP FINDS NEWT VORCE.

WHEN Newt Vorce disappeared so mysteriously in the cellar of the Silver Creek Tavern, slipping, as it were, through the very fingers of the young detective, Death-Grip could only whistle his astonishment and discomfiture.

"Cuss the fellow! He can't be very far away," he muttered. "I'll never be satisfied until I discover the secret of this place."

He ran up the steps at the back of the house, and leading his horse around to the stable of the tavern, put him in a stall. Then, just nodding to Susie, who was carelessly regarding him through a window of the house, he went down into the cellar again.

"Now, Mr. Vorce, to find out where you are, I don't think you acted wisely in giving me a hint that there was a secret exit down here. You are not a very smart scoundrel, after all, or you would never show your hand in that manner."

He took from inside his shirt a small tin box, on one side of which was a sort of glass button. The whole apparatus was fastened to him by a double string of green stuff like worsted.

"Now, my little beauty, we will see whether you are all right. Bull's-eye lanterns are very well in their way, but I think that you are better by a thousand per cent."

He walked into the darkest corner of the cellar—the spot on which he had last seen Vorce—and felt about the wall with his hand.

"Can't feel anything like a door. Let me see whether my little joker here will help me."

There was a faint click, and then the glass "button" became a fiery eye, sending a shaft of light that penetrated the gloom like a flash of lightning.

"Electricity is the thing! A bull's-eye wouldn't have been any good here," said Death-Grip softly to himself, as he turned the shaft of light hither and thither over the rocky walls of the cellar.

"H'm! Am I to be baffled after all? No, Mr. Young, you must not allow that."

He turned off his light and stood for a minute or two in deep thought.

"There must be a spring somewhere. Well, now, let me think. If there is a spring it is probably operated by a button, which must be pushed with the top of the finger. The button is more than likely to be of iron, steel or some metal, hidden somewhere in one of these many crevices in the stonework of the wall. Ha! I have it! I will try that first-cousin of electricity, magnetism, and see if it will help me."

Again he felt in one of those useful pockets inside his flannel shirt in which he appeared to keep everything that he might possibly need.

"Here it is. It has helped me before, and, I hope, will now."

He held up a large magnet as he spoke, turning on his electric light to enable him to see it.

He cautiously looked around to make sure that he was not watched. Then he gently drew the magnet along and about the wall.

Patiently he went over every part of the wall within his reach up in the dark corner.

"Am I knocked out, after all? I am afraid so," he thought.

Even as the foreboding passed through his mind he could hardly repress a cry of triumph. The magnet had "stuck."

"Got it, by Jupiter!" he said, in a joyful whisper.

Turning his little light full on the spot where some unseen force had arrested the magnet he saw something shining between two large, rough stones.

He placed his finger over the spot to mark it and returned his magnet to his pocket.

"A little steel knob. Just about what I expected. The only thing was to find it, and that my magnet has done for me. Science has brought more rogues to the gallows than all the detectives that were ever sworn in, I do believe."

With this philosophical reflection, the young man proceeded to avail himself of its benefits without loss of time.

He tried to push his finger on the steel knob, but the interstice was not wide enough. He soon overcame this difficulty by pushing the point of his bowie-knife into the space.

Slowly, silently, and as it seemed to the detective in a ghostly manner, a section of the wall some three feet wide and five high, swung out on hinges, showing a dark, cavernous space behind.

Death-Grip rapped on the smooth inner surface of the door with the handle of his knife, and satisfied himself that it was of iron. On the outside this slab of stone had been so deftly fastened that when the door was closed no one could tell, either by its appearance or by sounding it that it was anything but a stone wall as solid as that surrounding it. It had been designed and finished by a cunning hand.

Death-Grip did not wait long to admire the ingenuity of the arrangement. He first assured himself that he could easily open the door from within if necessary, and then closed it, the spring lock fastening with a click as if it were chuckling to itself because its secret had been discovered by the wrong man.

"Now, where the dickens will this place bring me out?" muttered the detective. "I daren't turn on my light. Vorce is too good a shot for that."

He felt around him, and decided that the passage in which he stood ran in two directions. Which way should he take?

A mere accident decided the question for him. Scratching his head in his perplexity he knocked off his hat. It fell toward the right. The young man grouped around on his hands and knees, and after a short search, found his lost head-gear.

"Perhaps that was intended by fate as a guide," he thought, at the same time laughing somewhat contemptuously at himself for thinking it. "Anyhow, I'll go that way."

Full of reckless daring, the young fellow struck boldly into the path to the right, his pistols ready in his belt for instant use, and his hands outstretched to keep him from running against the wall on either side.

"Mighty lively traveling this. I wonder what some of the boys at old Yale would think of me if they could see me now. Dick Young, 'Death-Grip the Dude,' who always wore clothes of the latest cut, and wouldn't have been seen on Chapel street in a last year's necktie for a hundred dollars—walking along a dirty passage in an atmosphere that you could cut with a knife, and wearing a cowboy outfit as rough as can be found on this side of the Rockies. Ah! Well! Perhaps I may wear good clothes and Parisian neckties again when I get through with this job. I wonder what she would think of me as a man of fashion. Perhaps she would rather have me as the Colorado cowboy, after all."

Here his thoughts became complicated, as was their custom when they turned toward Belle Ormsby, and he walked along in a reverie of hope and doubt concerning the lovely girl who had conquered his heart at one stroke that made him forget everything else, and take no note of the fact that he was walking swiftly along in pitch darkness, with a deadly foe perhas not half a dozen yards away.

But his dream had a rude awakening.

"Stars and garters! Great snakes! What's that?" he ejaculated, as he tumbled over something soft and alive, and went spinning forward on his face.

In a second he was on his feet again, pistol in hand.

"What's that?" he repeated, threateningly.

The only answer he received was to have his pistol-hand knocked up, and held by a hand singularly soft, but sinewy and powerful, notwithstanding.

Simultaneously with the hand grasping his wrist a soft light diffused itself over the scene from an open lantern held in the left hand of his mysterious antagonist.

"Hallo! young fellow!" ejaculated Death-Grip. "Haven't I seen you before?"

"Maybe you have. I've often been there."

The question and answer were exchanged while Death-Grip's hand was still held in the air, and ere he had recovered from the sudden start occasioned by his strange encounter.

"What's your name?" asked Death-Grip.

"Jake Drum. What's yours?"

"Dick Young."

"What are you doing here?"

"I am on an exploring expedition."

"On private property?"

"Well, yes, I suppose it is private property but I am seeking the gentleman who is supposed to own it, and I'm sure I have no desire to trespass."

Jake had released the young man's wrist and stood a little way back from him, with his lantern in his left hand and fingering his bright red necktie with his right, perfectly at his ease.

Death-Grip looked around him to see what sort of a place he was in but he only saw a rocky passage which led away into the darkness, and which might lead to the center of the earth for anything that he could tell to the contrary.

"What are you going to do now? You are in rather a bad situation, let me tell you. You can't go forward and you can't go back."

"Why not?"

"Well, you can't go forward because you will run into somebody that it won't be healthy for you to meet."

"Whom do you mean?" interrupted the detective, eagerly.

"Never mind," was Jake's short reply, as if he thought that he had already said too much.

"Why can't I go back if I desire it?"

"Because I will prevent it."

"You?"

"Yes—I—Jake Drum."

"You think you can do it?"

"I am sure I can."

The little man did not speak braggingly, but there was an easy confidence in his tones as if he were merely stating an incontrovertible fact. He was not in the least aware that he presented a ridiculous appearance in his knee-pants and red necktie, and did not take offense at the slight smile which Death-Grip found himself unable to repress.

"Suppose you try," said the detective coolly. He stepped up to the dwarf and made a move—

ment as if to pass him. He saw that he could not continue his search for Newt Vorce without making some arrangement with Jake.

Like a flash the dwarf had seized Death-Grip around the waist and with the wrestling trick known as a "cross-buttock—" that is, throwing him across his hip—had stretched him upon the ground, ere the young man had time to think.

Jake's victory was only temporary however. The detective had been taken by surprise, but he recovered himself as soon as he struck the ground and rolling over had Jake underneath him, completely at his mercy.

"Hold on, there," gurgled Jake. "This is very ungentlemanly. Let me get up. I have business to attend to, and I can't do it while I am lying here."

In spite of the fact that he knew he was in a perilous situation, Death-Grip could not help laughing at the ludicrous figure cut by the little man in his knee-pants and red necktie.

The lantern had dropped from his hand, but rested on the ground right-side-up, so that its rays fell full on Jake's face.

His countenance expressed astonishment more than anything else. Small though he was, he was possessed of immense strength, and it was not often that he met his match. His surprise and chagrin were all the greater, therefore, when he found that this young man from the East—this tenderfoot—was able to beat him at his own game.

"Now, Mr. Jake Drum, you'll excuse me, but I must fix you so that you will not interfere with me again in a hurry," said Death-Grip, still holding the other firmly on his back.

"What do you mean? Are you going to wipe me out?"

"I am not a murderer," answered the detective, with contemptuous brevity.

"Oh, ain't you? Well, I'm glad you told us."

Jake had recovered his equanimity, and was again the supercilious individual that afforded Belle Ormsby so much amusement.

"No, sir. I am not a murderer. But I can find means to secure your mouth without killing you."

"Taa-a-nks!" drawled Jake, ironically, as he carefully adjusted his red necktie.

"You see, Jake, I am generally provided with little things that I may need," observed Death-Grip, as he took from his inner pocket a small coil of wire.

Before Jake Drum divined his intention, the detective had secured the dwarf's hands by a few dexterous thrusts of the wire around his wrists, and the next instant had gagged him with a handkerchief.

"I guess that will keep you quiet for a while, Mr. Drum. And now to find Mr. Vorce!"

"Hyar he is," thundered a stern voice, and then the young detective found himself lying on the ground whither he had been thrown by a sharp tug on a lariat that had caught him under one arm and around the neck, so that any movement on his part would have strangled him.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH-GRIP IN THE TOILS.

NEWT VORCE stood for a brief space looking contemptuously at the young man, who returned the stare with interest.

Neither spoke, as the desperado busied himself in loosening the wire around Jake's wrists.

The first use the dwarf made of his hands was to feel whether his necktie had become disarranged, and the second to try and remove the handkerchief from his mouth.

Vorce saw that Jake could not get the handkerchief off, and remarked, in his usual grating tones:

"Guess we might as well leave it where it is. You talk too much, anyhow."

Jake redoubled his efforts to pull off the handkerchief and at last succeeded.

"You are the meanest man that I have ever met, Newton Vorce, and I have a good mind to lick you," he spluttered.

"Git!" was the other's laconic command.

Jake hesitated. He had been affronted, and would have dearly liked to be revenged on some one, but a threatening movement on the part of Vorce taught him that discretion was the better part of valor, and picking up his lantern, he marched off in the direction from which Death-Grip had come, leaving the detective and his enemy in the dark.

The young detective felt the rope tightening about his neck, warning him that he was completely in the power of the man who stood over him in the impenetrable darkness.

"So, young feller, you are still sneaking after me, are yer? Now you hev me, what are yer a-goin' ter do with me?" asked Vorce, mockingly.

The detective could not answer, even had he wished to do so, and the desperado went on:

"Now, look hyar: I don't like you, and I don't propose to be troubled with yer. I could shut off yer wind right now, ef I wanted ter."

He pulled the rope a little, and Death-Grip involuntarily gurgled under the pressure on his throat.

"Sho! It hurts, eh? Wal, I don't want ther trouble of killing yer now. I kin do it any time

but I tell yer straight you'll never git out uv this hyar place alive!"

With the rope cutting his flesh under his arm, and so tight around his neck that his brain seemed to be bursting, Death-Grip felt himself dragged along for a few yards, and then cast heavily against the wall.

To his surprise the wall gave way, and at the same moment the rope was slipped from his neck and body.

He staggered and clutched at the air as he felt that he was falling—falling!

Crash! He had been flung head-first down a flight of steps upon something soft and warm that moved from under him with a rattle and scuffle, and dropped him on the rocky floor.

"A horse!" he ejaculated, involuntarily.

He sat where he had fallen for a few minutes to collect his scattered senses, and listened.

His quick ear told him at once that there was more than one horse in the place. He could hear the champing of teeth as they ate their fodder and decided that there were at least four in the vicinity.

Looking up, he was delighted to catch glimpses of the blue sky here and there, and as his gaze traveled around him, he found that he could distinguish the different objects in his prison.

He was in a chamber perhaps twenty-four feet long by twelve wide. Like the passage through which he had come, it was apparently hewn through the solid rock, and was lighted by fissures in the roof similar to those referred to in a previous chapter.

"Wonder what horses these are?" he muttered, as he took from his pocket his small electric lantern and directed it full at the nearest animal.

"Just what I thought! Let me once get out of this, Mr. Vorce, and I think I shall have evidence that will convict you without much trouble."

On the haunch of the animal was a peculiar mark, something like a toadstool, which the detective recognized as Bob Brace's brand.

On each of the four horses in the chamber (for he had rightly divined the number), was the same brand, and he knew that he had found part of the stock whose loss the owner had been bewailing in the morning.

Now, what was he to do? He suspected that Vorce more than guessed that he was not the simple cowboy he pretended to be. Whether the desperado had discovered his true character he could not tell.

"Hardly," he muttered, pursuing his train of thought aloud, "or he would have wiped me out at once. He is afraid of me without knowing exactly why. Well, I'll try and give him a good excuse for his fear before he is many days older. In the mean time, I don't want to stay here longer than I can possibly help."

He walked cautiously all around his prison in the hope that some means of escape might present itself. The horses, who were all loose, responded to his caressing touch as he passed them with a low whinny, their instinct teaching them that he was a man to be trusted.

With the exception of the door through which he had come, at the top of four steps, and which was securely fastened now, he could not find any other exit in the shape of either door or window.

"Strange. I can hardly believe that he brought the horses in that way, down those steps. I'll make another search."

He went around the four walls more carefully than at first, tapping them here and there with the hilt of his bowie-knife.

"Ah. Here is a spot that sounds a little different. I have become so accustomed to mysterious doors in this confounded place, that I believe I can almost smell them."

He laughed out loud at this conceit, and was about to tap the place again, when he started back, with his heart beating like a trip-hammer.

Another laugh had sounded like the echo of his own.

Four or five notes of silvery laughter—a woman's laugh.

"Gracious powers! Is it possible!" he panted. He strained his ears to listen.

"Yes, by heavens! It is *her* voice!"

A ripple of laughter, and then, in sweet, low tones, the first few lines of the song that touches the most callous hearts when ever it is heard, "Home, Sweet Home."

Spellbound, the young man pressed his cheek against the hard rocky wall, and eagerly drank in the syllables: "Midst pleasures and palaces, where'er we may roam."

"Heaven bless her! It is an angel's voice! Ah! Belle! Belle! You must have guessed the secret of my love. I know—I feel—that you'll help me."

Mr. Richard Young, it must be remembered, was very much in love with Miss Belle Ormsby, and like lovers in general, was prone to jump to conclusions. Still, he did not neglect the natural caution of a detective, and waited to hear more before taking any step that might have proved disastrous to himself should Belle have sided with his enemies.

That she was close at hand he had received ample demonstration, and he had not the least

doubt that she could release him should she so desire.

He listened until she had finished the first verse of the song. Then all was quiet.

What should he do?

He would tap on the spot where he supposed her to be and abide by the result.

"What's that?" he heard her say, after he had banged as hard as he could two or three times with the handle of his knife.

"Miss Ormsby!" he cried.

No answer for two or three minutes, and then he was startled by hearing her voice right in his ear, whispering:

"Hush! I hear you, but do not speak so loud. There is a speaking-tube connecting the room I am in with the stable. Put your mouth to the place where you hear my voice and tell me whether you understand me."

Death-Grip obeyed, and was gratified to get a response in the same guarded tones:

"Vorce was here, and he heard something that made him go to the stable quickly. I recognized your voice, but dared not speak, for fear he might hear me. He is not with you, you say, and you are confined in the stable?"

"Yes."

"Where is Vorce?"

"I don't know."

"He did not come back here. I am in my father's shop. He must be somewhere near the stable."

"Can you not help me to escape?" asked the young man. "Have you a key to this place?"

"No. I have hardly ever been in the stable. Vorce and my father do not like me to go prying about the place, as Vorce puts it. But I will do what I can for you. Have patience and trust in me."

"Ay, that I will—till death," returned Death-Grip, passionately.

He stood still, patiently waiting for perhaps ten minutes.

"Will she come to me? Shall I owe my deliverance to her?" he thought.

Ha! What was that?

Somebody at the door!

He stole gently to the steps down which he had been thrown, and heard a rattling of the lock. The next instant the door opened, and Belle Ormsby, with a lantern in her hand, stood in the opening.

"Miss Ormsby!"

"Dick Young—Death-Grip!"

He sprang up the steps and pressed the hand of the girl, who was deadly pale.

"Hush! Do not speak! Come quickly. I feel a presentiment of danger. Vorce may return at any minute. He may be near us now," she whispered, in agitated tones.

"Had you a key to this door?"

"No. I picked the lock with this. See."

She held up a long rusty nail as she spoke.

"Which way are we to go?" asked the young man.

"To the shop. From there you can get on the street. Then you will be safe."

"Yes, I shall be safe," he repeated. "But you? What about Vorce?"

"He will not dare to injure me. Besides, he—he—"

The young girl hesitated, and a deep blush drove the paleness from her face.

"Yes, yes, I know," hastily ejaculated Death-Grip. "It is common talk that he is to marry you. He boasts of it in public."

The young man's remark, even though the truth, was in bad taste, but then he was jealous, and the green-eyed monster is not distinguished by either judgment or good taste.

"Does he dare?" cried Belle, indignantly.

"The wretch! I'll tell my father!"

"Tell him, Belle, and see what good it will do," hissed the voice of Newton Vorce, as that worthy stood before them with a pistol in each hand.

"Throw up your hands, thar, my lad, and git back to yer lodgings," he added. "No, don't do that, or I'll blow yer brains clear inter yer hat. Newt Vorce don't stand any foolin', remember."

The last observation was called forth by an involuntary movement of Death-Grip toward his belt, and which Vorce was quick to intercept.

In two minutes the detective was again a prisoner in the stable, minus pistols and knife, which the desperado mockingly assured him ere he closed the door should be returned the next time they met at a spring round-up.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER THE PRECIPICE.

It must be remembered that it was after the events related in the last chapter that Newt Vorce, with Belle Ormsby his prisoner, met the weird old woman on the mountain.

How Newt had left the laboratory of Old Seecrecy after having his head cracked by Jake Dunn must be explained in future.

"Whar the deuce did you come from?" he demanded of the hag, with a bravado that was a little strained.

"Never mind where I came from. I'm going with you," returned the old woman.

Without another word she turned around and

marched in front of Belle's horse, looking neither to right or left.

The desperado was puzzled and somewhat nervous, but could see nothing for it but to push on.

Up the winding path they went, occasionally encountering stumps of pine trees over which the horses had to climb with the utmost caution to save themselves from being dashed thousands of feet to the gulch below. Once a whole tree which had been broken off by wind or lightning lay across the path, its thick trunk and straggling branches forming an almost impassable barrier.

The hag, her white hair blowing wildly about her face, sprung, with a lightness unusual in one of her apparent age, into the straggling limb of the tree, and pointed out the way that the horses could follow.

"Ther old cuss knows all about steering horses up er mule path, anyhow," uttered Vorce.

Following the old woman's mute direction, Belle guided Daisy over the precarious footing afforded by the fallen tree, and was quickly followed by Newt Vorce.

Suddenly the old woman stopped, and, with a wave of her hand, disappeared.

"Durn her picture, she knows just whar it is." The desperado scowled as he spoke thus, the flash of blue lightning that played over the mountains, showing that the strange creature was running right into the rocky wall.

A clump of firs growing at the spot hid an opening in the mountain that was protected by a gum blanket.

"Go in, thar. Ride right in," commanded Newt, briefly. "Don't be afraid of ther old woman. I guess she's only some old crank ez managed to stumble on this place by accident."

Belle, too tired now to care about disobeying her captor, and moreover feeling quite capable of defending herself from actual injury, at a pinch, rode into the opening without replying. Her companion followed closely.

"Welcome ter Vorce's Palace," said the desperado, with a grin. "Ther old woman has lighted up, I see."

In truth, a large coal-oil lamp stood on a rude table and shed a strong light over the apartment.

The place was nothing more than a dug-out, extending far enough into the mountain to give plenty of room for half-a-dozen horses and their riders. It was not more than thirty feet from the ridge of the mountain, which sloped back from above, so that it had been necessary to roof a portion of the "palace" with rough shingles and branches of a fir tree.

Vorce helped Belle to dismount and, pointing to the end of the ranch, said:

"Back uv thet thar curtain you'll find er cot-bed an' sich. You kin hev thet little room fer yer boodywar."

Belle did not answer, but drawing her skirts around her, as if she feared contamination by his touch, walked into the little room and dropped the blanket that formed a curtain behind her.

"Halloa! Whar in thunder did you come from?" suddenly ejaculated Newt Vorce, as he stared at some one who had quietly taken a seat at the table, and was gazing at him in the full glare of the coal-oil lamp.

"I came from Silver Creek, my dear. Where else should I have come from?" was the composed response.

"From the devil fer what I know."

"Ha! ha! Well, my dear brother, I just want to show you that you can't fool Susie, that's all."

She speaker was indeed none other than Susie Vorce, who had vainly tried to prevent the abduction of Belle Ormsby by her scoundrelly brother.

Newt looked around the dug-out fearfully.

"What are you looking for, dear?" asked Susie, sweetly, watching him with an amused expression on her bright, wholesome face.

"Why—why—I thought ez—ez—some one else wuz hyar. Durn her parchment skin, I seen her come in hyar. I—"

He blundered about the place, looking behind the barrels, boxes and other things scattered here and there, his face getting blue with superstitious apprehension as he searched.

He led the two horses into a corner and gave them some water that he obtained from a natural spring just outside the door, still muttering to himself that he couldn't understand things, and that he believed he was bewitched.

"Newt, is this the person you are looking for?"

He turned toward the table and started back with a howl of terror.

Sitting at the table, where a minute ago had been his sister, was the hag that had preceded him up the mountain. She was in the same position as his sister had assumed. Her pale, withered face, with its blazing eyes, and with the white, straggling hair falling in a witch-like mantle on each side, was supported by her hands, looking, in the yellow glare of the lamp, inexpressibly awesome.

"You she-devil! Tell me who you are, or I'll send a bullet through you, as sure ez my name is Newt Vorce!" he howled.

"Don't be a fool, dear," said the hag, in the voice of Susie, as she pulled off her white wig, rubbed the chalk off her face with a handkerchief, and sat revealed as the red-cheeked, buxom Susie.

"Susie!" faltered Newt, dropping the butt of his Winchester with a crash. "I tell yer you kin almighty nigh bein' shot, let me tell yer."

"Oh, no, dear," coolly answered Susie, pointing her six-shooter at him. "I had this in my hand just below the table, and I could have made you hold up your hands before your rifle had got to your shoulder, just as easy!"

"You could, eh? Wal, now, Susie, I've stood your monkey work long enough. What d'ye mean by interferin' with my business?"

"Business!"

"Yes, business. I know what I'm er doin', an' I don't need any help from you."

"Newton Vorce, listen to me."

Susie had risen from her seat, and with the white wig still dangling from the fingers of her left hand, stood facing her brother, looking into his eyes without flinching.

"Listen to me, Newton Vorce."

"Oh, shut yer mouth. I ain't got no time to waste with women!" he returned, in a careless tone, though his gruff voice trembled a little nevertheless.

"No time for women, eh? Well, we will see. You have taken that young girl away from her home and brought her here to compel her to marry you."

Vorce shrugged his shoulders.

"You hev it down fine," he snarled.

"I have, as you will discover to your cost. You think you can scare that girl into marrying you. Now, let me tell you that you can't do it."

"Can't I?"

"No, you cannot. In the first place, she ain't the sort of girl that scares easily—"

"And in the second place?"

"And in the second place, I'll take a hand in this game and block it. Now, you hear me."

"You?"

"Yes—I. I could have shot you through the head as you rode away from Silver Creek this afternoon, and settled it that way, but—"

She hesitated, and her eyes dropped. Newt Vorce turned up his nose and smiled slightly.

"Wal, why didn't you shoot me through the head, and—and—settle it that way?"

"You know why—for the same reason that I have spared you before. Blood is thicker than water, and though you have never acted a brother's part to me—still you are my brother, and I couldn't do it."

"I wish you'd think uv yer duty toward yer brother at all times, and not be so fond uv meddlin' in my affairs."

"Newton Vorce, Belle Ormsby is a young girl, without any protector, for her old father is worse than nothing. She is my friend, and I'm going to stand by her and save her from you, and I'd do it if you were a hundred brothers rolled into one."

"You're er dandy, you are," sneered Newt.

"I mean what I say. I took a short cut to this place by climbing where you couldn't go with your horses, and by fixing myself up with this wig and putting a little white powder on my face I managed to scare you, but couldn't make you turn back—"

"Not much."

"No, but it might have been better for you if you had, for as sure as you try to prevent Belle Ormsby from going home with me in the morning, it will mean a serious time for you."

Without another word, Susie turned short around on her heel and marched into the little room where Belle Ormsby, tired out, had fallen fast asleep on the cot-bed.

"Curse her! Who would hev thought uv her makin' er break like thet? Don't make no difference. I hev to put ther thing through somehow. I'm goin' ter marry her. Old Secrecy will back me up. He's got ter do it, and Newt Vorce will kim out on top, ez usual."

The desperado walked to the door of the dug-out and looked down the path.

It was a fearful night. The rain, which had threatened as they rode up the mountain, had now broken forth with terrific violence, falling in great sheets that sent a roaring torrent down the mountain sides in every direction.

"Wal, she can't make any start ter-night in this weather, anyhow," he muttered, "so I guess it's safe for me ter take er nap myself."

A flash of lightning that seemed to lick up the water at his feet, followed by a deafening peal of thunder, sent him inside precipitately.

He looked to the horses to see that they were comfortable, and stretched himself on a buffalo hide in a corner, with his Winchester and revolver under his head.

"Dunno whether I ought to sleep, either," he muttered. "Thet thar Susie is er dangerous critter when she gets her blood up. She's er reg'lar Vorce fer thet."

He thought it over and over, until his brain became confused. He tried to keep his reflections in order, and while trying fell fast asleep.

"Now, Belle," whispered Susie, half an hour

later, as she led the young girl from the inner room, and stood, pistol in hand, gazing into the face of her sleeping brother.

He turned partly over, as if troubled with unpleasant dreams.

Like a flash, Susie's pistol was pointed at his head.

"Susie—Susie—could you kill your own brother?" whispered Belle, in horrified accents, as she placed her hand on Susie's wrist.

"I regard him as a murderous rascal now, and not as a brother. But, hurry, and I shall not have to kill him. Take your horse."

Belle chirruped softly, and Daisy came out of her corner, stepping carefully over the sleeping man and placing her nose on Belle's shoulder.

"It's raining hard still. You will get wet, but that is nothing so long as you get back to Silver Creek. Then get some of the men to help you and come right back. I won't stand between him and the law any longer. A few months in jail for this night's work will do him good," whispered Susie, as, Belle having seated herself in the saddle, she led the mare out of the dug-out to the narrow path.

"There is something wrong with my stirrup," said Belle. "Never mind! I'll fix it."

Before Susie could interfere, the girl had sprung lightly from the saddle, fastening a buckle that had somehow come loose.

"Hist!" was Susie's warning whisper. "Mount quickly and get away! He's awake!"

Belle tried to get into the saddle, but her feet became entangled in her riding-habit. Daisy gave a sudden movement, and the girl, with a shriek of terror, fell over the fearful precipice, just as Newt Vorce, rifle in hand, appeared in the doorway of the dug-out, like a spirit of evil.

CHAPTER X.

NEW USE FOR A BUCKING BRONCHO.

LET us go back to Death-Grip, whom we left in Vorce's stable, weaponless, and with but little chance of escape, since it was certain that Vorce would keep his eye on Belle hereafter.

The young detective recognized the hopelessness of his situation as the door closed with a bang, and he heard the retreating footsteps of Vorce outside.

"Cheer up, Death-Grip, old man! You've been in bad fixes before, and always got out of them, and you'll get through this if you only keep your courage up. You never took back-water at York, where you had to deal with men. Don't let a skunk like this fellow Vorce make you squeal!"

The young fellow talked to himself in this strain until he really began to feel better, and could take a cool view of his predicament.

The door was his only hope!

"Ha! Happy thought! By gracious, I believe I have it! Why didn't I think of it before?"

With trembling eagerness he drew forth his small electric lantern, and began searching for something on the floor.

"She dropped it, I am sure. If I can only find it I will be out of this place before Newt can swear once!"

He groped about systematically. Commencing in a corner, he ran his hand carefully along the floor over a space about a foot wide. Then he came back in the same way, taking in another foot. In this way he was sure that he would cover every portion of the floor.

He had been nearly an hour searching thus, when he uttered a glad cry and pounced upon something that the bright light of his lantern brought into view.

A long, rusty nail!

It was the very nail with which Belle Ormsby had picked the lock and released him over an hour before.

He held it in his fingers and pressed it to his lips in rapture.

At last he held the means to freedom, and would soon have a chance of meeting the scoundrel he was after on equal terms in the free air.

He was in no immediate hurry to make his way out. He wanted to make sure that Vorce was not in the passage.

Intently the young man listened, still with the key in his hand.

"I guess he isn't there, unless he is keeping very quiet on purpose to catch me. Oh, no, he would not do that. Why should he? He has no idea that I can get out, and that dark passage is not the most agreeable resting-place in the world."

He stepped boldly toward the door, and had already one foot on the steps when a movement among the horses made him stop.

As has been said, the light coming through the crevices in the roof was sufficient to make everything in the stable dimly visible, though it was not strong enough to make the finding of a nail among the rubbish on the floor an easy job.

"What in thunderation are those horses doing?"

For answer, one of them, a wiry animal of the peculiar rusty hue that showed much exposure to wind and sun, emitted a tremendous neigh, and sprang on the back of another horse, his counterpart in size and activity, but of a dirty white in color.

Death-Grip saw at once the cause of the trouble. Newt Vorce had committed the indiscretion of putting two stallions in the same stable, and, with the natural tendency of all male animals to fight, they had thrown down the gauntlet to each other, and were prepared for a duel to the death.

Now, a fight between two enraged horses is often enjoyed by cowboys on the open plain, where there is plenty of room, but it was not quite so pleasant for the detective in the narrow compass of a stable from which he could not possibly escape, no matter how lively things might become.

The only thing that he could do was to stand at the top of the steps and watch. He had no weapon save his quirt, which fortunately he had stuck in his belt, and which Newt Vorce had not thought it worth while to confiscate.

Meanwhile the battle between the stallions had commenced in earnest.

The white had turned quickly when the other jumped on his back, and had thrown him almost to the ground.

The other two horses got as far away from the combatants as possible, showing their terror by neighing and nervously twitching their ears.

The two stallions gave each other battle in a style that was very human. They reared up on their hind hoofs and actually boxed with their fore feet like professional pugilists. Any cowboy or horse-herder will tell you that stallions fight in this way, strange as it may seem.

They struck at each other on the head, neck and shoulders, every blow from the sharp hoofs drawing blood.

Occasionally they dropped exhausted on all-fours, but a vicious kick from behind by one or the other would set the battle raging more fiercely than before, and they would stand up to their work again for either death or victory.

The contest brought them all over the stable, and Death-Grip had enough to do to avoid a fatal kick from one or both of the combatants.

But he did not mind that. The game battle fired his young blood, and he was interested in it to the exclusion of all other thoughts for the time being.

"Ten dollars on the white!" he yelled, forgetting that he was alone. "That chestnut hasn't half the pluck of the other fellow. Ah! that was a good one, white, straight from the shoulder. Why didn't you follow it up while you had the advantage? Our old professor in the gymnasium at Yale would have been crazy if he had seen such a chance go by default."

Here the rusty brown horse gave the white two kicks that laid that hero on his back with his heels in the air.

Brown was about to finish white by the effective process of jumping on him when the door was suddenly burst open and Newton Vorce, flourishing a long whip, rushed down the steps and attacked the brown horse like a fiend.

Cut! Slash! Bang! Crash!

The whip descended on the horse's head and neck with brutal force, and in less than half a minute he was completely cowed.

Then the man turned on the white, and kicking him until he got up, looked him over to see if he was hurt.

"Git out of this hyar, yer brute!" he growled, "or that little brown will kill yer yer. I hate anything that lets itself be licked, whether it's horse or man."

"You're right for once, Newt Vorce; so do I," muttered Death-Grip, who had been modestly hiding behind one of the other horses. "I guess I'll get out of this right now."

He made a dash for the door, clearing the four steps at a bound, when the long lash of Vorce's whip twined around his throat, and he was brought back with a jerk that laid him on the ground of the stable.

"Not yet, young feller, an' don't yer try it. It won't be healthy fer yer. D'ye understand?" said Vorce, as he pointed his pistol threateningly at the young man.

He drove the white horse up the steps and through the doorway with two or three slashes of his whip, shutting and fastening the door after him, and leaving a very disgruntled assemblage in the stable.

The brown horse was sore in body from his battle, and hurt in spirit by Newt Vorce's attack upon him; the other two horses were nervous, excited and restless on general principles, and Death-Grip was in a towering rage.

"Now look out for me, Newt Vorce," he hissed through his teeth, as he shook his fist at the door. "I'll make you pay for every outrage a thousand-fold! To think that Dick Young should have to feel that fellow's whip around his neck! Gods! It makes me crazy!"

He clutched the rusty nail in his fingers and waited patiently, five, ten, fifteen minutes.

Then he went to the door and put the nail in the keyhole.

A few wriggles and twitches and his heart leaped as he felt the bolt shoot back.

He pushed the door. It would not move. He pushed again with all his force! Still it remained tightly closed.

The perspiration stood in drops upon his forehead as he realized that his captor had foreseen

a possible escape, and had taken means to prevent it.

The door was bolted on the outside.

For a few moments Death-Grip was too much disappointed to care what he did. Then his naturally buoyant spirits arose again, and he was more determined than ever to get out of the clutches of his enemy.

He examined the door carefully, in hope that he might be able to push something between the edge of the door and the door-post, and slip the bolt back.

He soon saw that this was hopeless. The door fitted so closely that the thinnest knife-blade would not have gone in.

He sat down on the steps and looked upward as he tried to think out a plan of escape.

"Wonder whether this roof is all solid rock, and where it comes out, anyhow," he said softly to himself.

With Death-Grip, to think and act were simultaneous impulses. He reckoned that if he could get on the back of one of the horses, standing, he could easily reach the roof.

"I'll try it, anyhow," he muttered.

Which horse should he try?

The rusty stallion, though quiet enough now, was hardly the animal upon which one would wish to try amateur circus tricks, and Death-Grip dismissed him at once from his thoughts.

The other two horses were bronchos of the ordinary type, and might both be incorrigible "buckers" for all that he could tell.

"It would be rather painful if they were to take it into their heads to throw me up to the roof. They could knock my brains out with neatness and dispatch, and I should hardly know what struck me. Never mind! Here goes!"

He was too good a horseman to find any difficulty in mounting one of the bronchos, but it was not so easy to stay on his bare back without saddle or bridle. The brute threw up his hind feet, and Death-Grip slid over his head and dropped upon the ground, in spite of all his efforts to retain his seat.

"So much for that attempt," he said, laughing, in spite of himself, at the matter-of-fact way in which the broncho had relieved himself of his rider.

There was the other horse left, which was his sole remaining chance, and the ugly way in which he threw his ears back was not particularly reassuring to a man accustomed to reading the meaning of a horse's ears.

"I'm going to have trouble with him, I know, but I must try it."

With a light bound he was on the broncho's back, and was thrashing him with his quirt with all his might.

The horse evidently did not understand this treatment, for he stood stock-still for a minute. Then, with his ears laid flat back along his head, he stiffened himself in the form of an arch, and sent his rider flying with fearful force against the roof.

A jar that shook the young man's spinal column, and seemed to be splintering his skull, and then, with a feeling that a cool breeze was playing on his cheeks, he became unconscious.

How long he remained before his senses returned he never knew, but it was quite dark when he found himself, stiff and sore, firmly wedged between two rocks, with his head and half his body above ground, his elbows holding him up, and preventing his falling back into the stable.

The broncho had thrown him, by the merest accident, against a spot of soft earth in the roof of the stable, and had actually "bucked" him into freedom.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT JOB ON HAND.

As Belle disappeared over the cliff, Susie uttered an irrepressible shriek, and her brother rushed forward.

Too late! The girl was out of sight, and not a sound could be heard save the pattering of the rain-drops and the whistling of the wind down the crooked pass. Belle had not made the slightest outcry as she dropped into the awful space.

For a moment or two Vorce looked at his sister, as if he would throw her over, too.

"What were yer doin', you wildcat?" he growled, vindictively. "You're allers interferin' with my business, an' now the gal ez—ez—I loved—is down thar, smashed inter nothin'."

"You loved her, eh, Newt? Get into your hole. You make me tired."

Susie said this in accents of ineffable contempt, and the desperado, who was too much excited over the sudden and awful death of Belle to care about quarreling with his sister, took Daisy by the bridle and went slowly into the dug-out.

"Whar are you goin'? I s'pose you're goin' to stay hyar to-night?" he said, interrogatively.

"Not much. I'm going to find out where that girl is. At least the poor child shall not lie down there without some one going to see where she fell."

"What's ther use? She's smashed all to pieces, sure, an' thar ain't no use bothering over a dead woman, no matter how good-lookin' she was when she was alive."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before his sister had sprung at him and given him a blow with her fist that sent him sprawling inside the dug-out.

"You miserable hound! I'll kill you some day, I know. Lie where you are. If you try to get up till I'm gone I'll shoot you through the head!"

She was blazing with fury, and Newt knew that she would keep her word if he provoked her too far. She was quick on the trigger, and she already had her hand on the pistol that was always at her belt within easy reach.

"Wal, go on. It's your funeral not mine. Ef you want to go an' look for ther gal I ain't got no objections. But it'll take yer several hours' to git around to the place whar she is now—2,000 feet below."

"None of your business!" snapped Susie, as she drew her shawl around her and went out into the darkness and drizzling rain.

Vorce got up and went to the door.

"Durn her picture! I don't know what ter do now. I liked ther gal, an' besides, I wanted ter marry her fer other reasons. Now—"

The sharp rattle of horse's hoofs going down the path struck his ear.

"By gum! Then she had 'er horse byar somewhar! Wal, she's a corker. Guess smartness runs in ther Vorce family, anyhow, and—Throw up yer hands!" he shrieked, suddenly, as he presented his pistol at a form that loomed up indistinctly in the darkness within a few feet of him.

"Don't make so much fuss about it. My hands are all right. You upset my nervous system with all this howling."

There was a comical tone of querulous complaint in the new-comer's voice, and Vorce was almost inclined to laugh in spite of the worried state of mind he was in.

"Jake Drum!"

"Yes, Jake Drum. Of course it is! Who else should it be? Where could you find anybody else to be such a durned fool as to come up here in this rain and in the middle of the night but Jake Drum?"

"What did yer come for?"

"Because I am a mutton-headed idiot. It's a wonder I got here at all, too."

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Jake Dunn, in an injured tone. He was in that peculiarly dismal state of mind when even the sound of another human voice is an annoyance.

"Yes, why? Can't yer say anything?" asked Newt Vorce impatiently.

"Well, I came up here with a message from the boss."

"Ther boss?"

"Yes; he is the boss, isn't he, Old Secrecy?"

"What does he want?"

"I'll tell you directly. But first of all, Newt, who was that went tearing down this mule-path on horseback just now? I couldn't see, but the narrow escape I had from being crushed against the wall or thrown over the mountain, makes me shiver."

The two had stepped into the dug-out while talking, and Jake shivered ostentatiously to illustrate his observation.

"I dunno who it was," grunted Vorce.

"No, of course not. Never catch you knowing anything you don't want to know. But I tell you that my costume has suffered coming up here. Have you got such a thing as a mirror in this cabin?"

"No!" very shortly.

"I thought not. A man like you can't be expected to know anything about the little necessities of a gentleman. I wish I had a clean necktie."

Jake arranged the red ribbon at his throat, and taking a large handkerchief from his pocket, made a great business of dusting off his clothing, the knee pants getting a very large share of attention. Over his shirt-waist he wore a heavy coat, which he threw off upon entering the dug-out.

At last he was tittivated to his satisfaction, and taking a seat by the table, on which the lighted lamp still stood, prepared to give his message to Vorce.

The desperado stood by the side of Daisy, patting her neck in the caressing way usual with a lover of horses, but scowling savagely at Jake the while.

"You see, Mr. Vorce, the boss—"

"Old Secrecy, I s'pose yer mean."

"You're right—that's the gentleman I mean. Well, he had a letter he wanted you to get to-night, and I brought it."

"Wal, whar in thunder is it?" interrupted Vorce savagely. "You chattering fool! Whar is it?"

"Here it is. And as for being a chattering fool, Mr. Vorce, why—"

"Shut yer head!" growled Vorce, snatching the letter Jake held out to him, and rapidly possessing himself of its contents.

"Yes, I'll shut it when I feel like it," muttered Drum to himself. "I'm going to get even

with you yet, Mr. Vorce, for several little things you have done on the boss, and Miss Belle and me. You'd have killed the boss in his laboratory last night if it hadn't been for me."

"What are yer mumblin' about over thar?" growled Vorce, looking up from the note to Jake.

Jake did not answer, and the other went on: "What time did Secrecy give you this?"

"About two hours ago—just long enough for me to ride up here like the very deuce."

"Humph! Whar's yer horse?"

"Out on the mule-path."

"Is he in good condition?"

"Do you think he can be, after my riding him for all that was in him from Silver Creek to here?"

"Wal, you'll hev to use him a little more. Thar's er job on hand ter-night."

"To night?"

"Yes, thet's what this hyar letter's about. You kin read it if yer want ter."

"Th-a-a-uks! But I'm not a college graduate, and I'd rather not read it."

"Ah, I forgot how durned ignorant you wuz. You can't read, kin yer?"

"No."

"Wal, ther letter says ez ther Leadville stage is ter pass through Silver Creek about two o'clock in ther mornin', an' will go through Lone Pine Gulch along about three."

"Ahl!"

"Wal, you know what ther letter means?"

"I suppose I do," returned Jake, shaking his big red head and blinking his dull eyes dubiously.

"Oh, you only suppose, eh? You think p'r'aps thet Old Secrecy 'ud take ther trouble to write an' send you up hyar with er letter just for fun, eh?"

"Not much fun in it."

"No, I should say not. Wal, anyhow, we've got to meet thet thar stage in Lone Pine Gulch. So git ready ter start."

"I don't like the job."

"I don't care er durn what yer like. You'll hev ter come. Did yer leave Miss Belle at ther house when you kin away?"

"I don't know. I came right from the laboratory—the other way—so I didn't go through the house at all. I suppose she was there all right."

"Oh, yes, I guess she wuz all right."

There was a peculiar ring in Vorce's tones as he made this last observation that did not escape the notice of the little man with the red hair, blue eyes and queer costume.

"I wish he wouldn't talk about Miss Belle," muttered Jake. "I don't like to hear him mention her name. If I ever kill him it will be just because I don't mean to let him have Miss Belle."

"If thet thar little cuss knew thet ther gal was lyin' dead on ther rocks 2,000 feet below hyar I guess I'd hev ter watch him. He's kinder dangerous sometimes," were the reflections that passed through the mind of Newt Vorce. "I ain't forgiven him for knocking me stiff last night when I wuz hevin' ther racket with Old Secrecy in ther laboratory about things in general."

The desperado shook himself as if to get rid of all unpleasant thoughts, and said aloud:

"Are yer fixed fer business?"

Jake, for answer, showed that he had a six-shooter and a bowie-knife.

"Thet all yer hev?" asked Vorce.

"Yes."

"Well, you'll hev to take er rifle. We may hev trouble, 'cause Secrecy says ez thar is a lot of dust on ther coach, an' ther people with it might try ter be ugly."

"Very likely."

Vorce went into a dark corner of the cave and brought forth a shining Winchester repeating-rifle, which he handed to Jake.

"Thar she is—er beauty, too. Sure fire an' ez easily handled as er baby's rattle. I hate almost to let yer hev sich a pretty instrument. Hyar's er cartridge-belt, too. Put it 'round yer ugly carcass."

Jake Drum obeyed with a sniff of disgust. He did not like to be referred to in such disrespectful language, for he had a very high opinion of his own personal appearance and qualifications.

"Demon?"

At the sound of his name Vorce's beautiful black horse walked in a slow and stately manner from the corner of the dug-out, and pushed his nose into his master's face.

"Whar's your horse, Jake?"

"Here he is."

Sure enough, the horse that the little man had ridden put his head into the dug-out and blinked curiously at the lamp.

"He is in good condition," declared Vorce.

"Git on him."

Jake obeyed without a word. He saw that nothing was to be gained by remonstrance.

Vorce turned out the lamp, dropped the curtain in front of the cave, and having seen that Daisy was properly secured, with plenty of fodder and water within reach, threw himself upon Demon, and rode at an easy canter down the path, with Jake at his heels.

CHAPTER XII.

YANK STOREY'S SUBSTITUTE.

THE two rode silently down the path until they reached the place where the wagon-trail branched off to the left.

"Hyar we air, Jake. Ride keerfully 'long hyar, an' keep yer eyes peeled."

"They're peeled," answered Jake, sulkily, adding to himself, "and they are watching for any breaks on your part, too, Mr. Vorce."

"See that clump of pines just in front of us?" asked Vorce, after a while.

"How can I see anything in this darkness?"

"Wal, that shadow is the pines."

"Well?"

"Wal, that's ther place whar we hev to wait. Ther rain's stopped, but it'll keep dark. It's er new moon, and it hez gone long ago."

"What am I to do?"

"I'll show yer. Ride in behind this place and git off yer horse."

Acting under the other's directions, Jake Drum took his horse into the pine thicket that edged the rough rocky road, and secured him to a branch where he could not be seen even in daylight.

"That's right. Hev yer got him tethered so ez you kin loose him easily? If this hyar happens ter fail, you may want ter ride away almighty quick, remember," warned the desperado.

As he spoke he led Demon into the same place, by the side of the other horse.

"Ain't you going to fasten him?" asked Jake.

"What fer? D'ye think ez Demon don't know his biz? He'll never stir. He's been in too many jobs of this kind afore."

"That's so," acquiesced Jake. "So has mine for that matter, but he's never safe when there are shots flying about, and I always have to hitch him."

"Hist! Hyar she comes!"

Both men hastily secreted themselves among the trees, and looked to their arms.

"Put on yer handkercher," whispered Vorce.

"All right."

Each took a large handkerchief from his pocket which he tied around his face just below the eyes.

"Durn those short pants uv yourn," growled Vorce. "Ef they see them we are given away, sure. Mind you keep yer long heavy coat buttoned to the bottom. Don't see why in thunder yer wear sich clothes. Ef I wuz yer boss I wouldn't let yer do et."

Jake did not answer. He was listening to the sound of wheels which were rapidly approaching.

"I guess they're a little skeery of this hyar place. I held 'em up hyar over a year ago; an' they think I may do it ag'in, I guess," muttered the desperado.

He en-conced himself behind a huge pine that grew in the middle of the thicket, in a space of about six feet clear all around it. It was the "lone pine" from which the gulch took its name.

Behind the thicket a little distance the mountain arose almost straight, while on the opposite side of the gulch was another precipitous wall, cracked here and there by huge fissures, and with great overhanging brows of rocks threatening to tumble down into the valley and crush anything that might be passing below.

It was a weird, wild place.

Far above in the black vault of heaven a fugitive star could be seen, the best sign that the storm was really over for the time, while the mournful song of the wind as it stirred the tops of the trees seemed to be the impotent wrath of the spirit of the tempest that its power had temporarily vanished.

"Look out, Jake. Hyar she is!"

A faint light could be discerned far down the path, while the sharp click and shuffling of horses' hoofs struggling on an up-grade gave token that the lumbering stage was no easy thing to drag up the steep pass.

"Yer see, Jake, they'll be pretty well tucked out when they git ez high ez this place," whispered Vorce. "Thet's whar we hev 'em at a disadvantage, don't yer see?"

"Oh, yes, you are awfully smart, Mr. Vorce," answered Jake Drum, dryly.

He did not like his present situation, and he was not disposed to hide his feelings.

"Git up thar!" howled the voice of the stage-driver. "Durn yer skin, I'll cut yer durn ears off'n yer. Git up thar, you white-jowled son of a drunken coyote! Pull on this hyar wagon, will yer, an' let's git a mile more on ther road ther Denver afore sun-up. Git on! Who-o-o-o-o-p-e-e-e-e!"

This last word was a long-continued yell that seemed to make the rocks tremble, but had apparently no effect on the horses, for the loud crack of the whip and the continued adjurations of the driver were more emphatic than ever.

"Yank Storey must hev a cold. I never heard his voice ez hoarse ez that before," muttered Vorce. "Wal, a man ez hez been drivin' stage ez long ez he hez is li'ble to git hoarse."

"What's the plan?" whispered Jake.

"You river Yank with yer Winchester."

That's all ez you hev ter do," answered Vorce, in the same tones.

"G'lang thar!" yelled the driver again.

"G'lang, or I'll cut yer in two."

The long whip flashed out like a wicked snake over the heads of the leaders, seeming to touch up all four horses at once.

The lumbering stage gave a jerk and had reached the thicket of pines, when—

"Hold on thar! Hands up!"

Two men stood in the road, one on each side, pointing rifles at the driver and the man sitting by his side.

"Hands up!" screeched the taller of the two men in the road.

The driver and the man at his side obeyed, the former dropping the reins on the horses' backs.

"Get down out o' that, Yank," added the tall man, as his keen eye traveled over the coach and noted that only two persons were inside.

The man by the side of the driver rolled over and came down from the coach all in a heap, with his hands held high in the air, Vorce keeping him carefully covered the while.

The two persons in the coach, one of whom was evidently a woman, remained quite still, though Vorce kept his eye on them suspiciously, ready to block any attempt they might make to assist the driver and his companion.

The desperado stepped up to the man with his hands up and relieved him of a revolver and bowie-knife, a silver watch and a bag of gold coin secreted in a side pocket in his shirt.

"Stand back over thar," commanded Vorce.

"Whar!"

"Travel!" answered Vorce, threateningly, poking the stranger in the chest with the muzzle of the rifle.

Without another word the man, still with his hands up, turned on his heel and walked forward until the darkness swallowed him.

"Stay thar till I tell yer to move," cried Vorce, in the direction the other had taken, though he could not see him.

"I'll stay!" came back the reply.

"Keep yer rifle on thet thar Yank. He's li'ble ter be treacherous," added Vorce to Jake.

"Well, hurry yourself. I'm getting tired of this job," grumbled Jake.

Vorce opened the door of the coach, but closed it again, as he muttered:

"Thar's no use in it. I don't suppose that woman hez anything. She's in er dead faint, anyhow. An' as fer ther man, he's asleep, and he might be raisin' a fuss ef I war ter wake him."

He climbed up on the back of the coach and loosened the straps that held a heavy iron-bound chest on the roof.

The words "Wells, Fargo & Co.," painted in big white letters were faintly discernible in the gloom to Vorce, because he knew what the words were, and did not need more than a hint to enable him to decipher them.

Vorce looked around him. He could see that Jake Drum was still holding his rifle at his shoulder pointed directly at Yank Storey's head, and that the fellow who was by the side of the driver had not returned to the coach.

"Durn this hyar box! It's heavy enough," he spluttered, as he tugged at the iron-bound chest. "Wonder whether it's dust ez weighs as heavy as this?"

As he spoke he pulled it from the coach and it fell heavily to the ground.

"Git on thar, Yank," he yelled. "We got all we want. Git!"

The driver stooped to reach his lines as Jake stepped back.

"Give 'em up ter me. I can't reach 'em," growled the driver. "I s'pose you're goin' ter keep that thar box?"

"I s'pose so," answered Vorce, cheerfully.

"Tell Wells, Fargo & Co., ez you met Mr. Fargo on ther road, an' he took charge uv ther property, d'ye hyar what I say?"

"I hyar yer."

"Good! Wal, thar's yer lines. Now git on," returned Vorce, as he lifted up the reins on the end of his rifle and put them in the hands of the driver.

Like a flash, the latter seized the Winchester and swung it around, club fashion, just as two shots rung out from Jake Drum's weapon.

Bang! Bang!

Both ineffective, for the Winchester came down on Vorce's shoulder—missing his head by less than an inch—and stretched him on the road.

The horses took fright at the flash and report of Jake's rifle, and plunged wildly forward, throwing the driver to the ground on top of Vorce. A woman's shrieks from the inside of the coach added to the excitement, and the din was almost maddening.

The horses dashed up the gulch, and the coach was soon out of sight and bearing.

"Curse you! Let go my throat!" hissed Newt Vorce, as the driver, with knee on the desperado's chest, held his throat with a desperate clutch. "Yank, what are yer doin'! Thar ain't no call ter choke er man. An' you know I'll make it all right with yer, ez I hev afore."

Still the driver did not relax his hold. He

seemed determined to put Vorce beyond the power of doing any more mischief, if possible.

Meanwhile, Jake was dauncing around the two men, rifle in hand, but without taking any part in the struggle.

The one star already referred to had been joined by a great many others, and it was comparatively light—light enough at all events to enable Jake to see that the stranger had the better of Vorce, and that the desperado was likely to be shut off from further earthly usefulness unless some one helped him very soon.

The hankerchiefs remained upon the faces of Jake and Vorce, so far the stage driver having failed to remove that from the countenance of his antagonist.

"Serves you right, Mr. Vorce. I thought somebody would make you pay for your dirty tricks on Mr. Ormsby, and Belle and me," muttered Jake. "But there is no use in my staying here. I don't want to be strung up for a road-agent especially when I am in the business because I cannot help it. I'll retire."

He disappeared into the thicket, while the two men on the ground redoubled their efforts to vanquish each other.

Vorce had contrived to get out of the grip of the driver and was now trying to pull his arm from beneath him, he having fallen on his back with his right hand and arm doubled under him.

With a mighty tug, he managed to extract it, with a six-shooter in his grasp.

"Now, let me go," he thundered, as he pressed the cold muzzle of the pistol against Yank Storey's temple. "Let go yer hold, or I'll blow yer to powder!"

His assailant did not answer, but, with a sudden twist, directed the aim of the revolver as it was discharged with a loud report, and at the same time tore the hankerchief from the desperado's face.

"Newton Vorce!" exclaimed the stage-driver, starting back in astonishment.

The start was an unfortunate one for the driver.

Vorce, quick as a cat, turned his foe over so that he had him underneath, and grabbing at his heavy beard with his left hand, pull it off.

"Dick Young—Death-Grip, by thunder!" he shrieked, as gritting his teeth, he forced back the young detective, and held him completely at his mercy.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD SECRECY SEARCHES FOR HIS DAUGHTER.

ABOUT the time that Vorce and Jake Drum were laying tribute in the Leadville coach, Old Secrecy was busy on his laboratory.

He had been working for several hours and had got a large pile of silver dollars ready as the result:

"The last day's work I'll do," he said to himself, as he fastened up the packages of counterfeit money and prepared to leave. "Your power over me, Newt Vorce, has come to an end. And Belle! No, I cannot let him have my child, just to save me from a prison. A prison! Pshaw! He dare not say anything. I hold the key to too many of his guilty secrets, and for his own safety, he dare not betray me. This is the last day—the last day!"

An electric bell just over his head rung in a short peal and then stopped, as though somebody in a great hurry had hastily pushed the button at the other end of the wire and taken his finger away at once, too impatient to hold it.

"Ah! Somebody in the shop. I suppose Belle must be away, or—what is more likely—asleep. Of course—of course," he added, as he appeared to collect his thoughts, "at four o'clock in the morning. What am I talking about? Belle is in bed, of course, and it must be some one pushing the button outside. Suppose it should be—but no; Vorce couldn't have put the police on my track yet. He dare not; he dare not!"

Muttering to himself in an incoherent way, Old Secrecy hastily took off the leather apron he had been wearing, and putting on his coat and hat, prepared to go to the shop, and see what was wanted.

The bell was ringing furiously now, without stopping, showing that the visitor was holding the button with the evident intention of not releasing it until the bell was answered.

"If I had known that an electric bell could be so troublesome, I doubt whether I should ever have put this in," he grumbled, as he disappeared into the secret passage leading to his shanty on the village street that has already been described.

He reached the inside of the big chest in the back room, opened it cautiously and stepped out.

Everything was in darkness.

He made his way into the other apartment—the blacksmith-shop, and walked over into Daisy's corner.

The mare was not there!

The old man shuddered with an apprehension that he was afraid to put into words, as he went to the front door and shot back the bolts.

Hardly had he done so, when the door was burst open, and a woman, in clothes soaked with rain, stood before him.

"Susie!" he gasped. "What's the matter?"

"Belle—"

"Belle! What about her? Where is she? Her horse isn't here. Is she out?" he faltered.

"Out! Yes, she is! Oh, old man—old man! What kind of a father are you?" asked Susie, in tones of sorrowful reproach.

Old Secrecy stepped back, and mechanically lighted a lamp.

Susie followed him into the shop and closed the door.

"When did you see Belle last?" she asked.

"Not since this morning. I have been busy in my laboratory all day."

"Where is Jake Drum?"

"I—I sent him out."

"To the mountains, eh?"

"Wh—what do you mean?"

"Nothing, only I passed him up in the mountains two or three hours ago."

"In the mountains? What were you doing there?" asked Old Secrecy, passing his hand over his eyes, as if trying to restrain his wandering ideas.

"I was there to save your daughter!" said Susie, solemnly.

Old Secrecy started back with an expression of horror, as he hoarsely murmured: "To save my daughter—my Belle? What do you mean?"

He seized her by the arm as he spoke, looking wildly into her eyes.

"I mean just this," she answered, coldly.

"You are willing to sell your girl to that rascally brother of mine, and he, finding that he could not get her consent to a marriage with him, bore her away by force, and backed up his villainy with a forged letter from you."

"A forged letter," mechanically repeated Old Secrecy. "Where is my Belle now?"

"That I want to find out, if you will come with me. I only hope we may find her alive!"

"Alive! I swear that if any harm has befallen her, Newton Vorce shall feel the weight of my vengeance in a way that he little expects!"

As Old Secrecy uttered these words with his right arm above his head, the yellow glare of the lamp falling upon his gray hair and withered features made him look like a priest of some ancient faith invoking the curse of his gods upon the head of a wrong-doer.

"Fudge!" was Susie's impatient comment. "What is the use of your standing here and saying what you mean to do? Come along and do something."

"I will—I will!" answered Old Secrecy, nervously, as he pushed Susie out of the house, and following her, locked the door on the outside.

It was daylight when the two, mounted on the small, but wiry mustangs that Susie brought from the underground stable with which Death-Grip had been made so painfully acquainted, crawled up the mountain wagon trail toward the spot where Belle must have fallen from the ledge above.

Susie had not yet told the old man about Belle's fate, preferring that he should be led up to it by slow degrees. There was a good deal of human nature in Susie beneath her hard exterior.

"This isn't the way to Newt's dug-out," he said, as he awoke from a reverie that had lasted since they left the village.

"I know it," was Susie's short response. "But you do as I tell you."

The path here turned sharply to the left, running downward to the base of the mountain, and joining the main road between Leadville and the next town which was used by the stage-coach.

"This must be the place," muttered Susie, as she looked up and saw signs high above her head which she recognized as being in the vicinity of her brother's retreat.

Old Secrecy had resigned himself entirely to the guidance of his companion, and hardly looked around him as Susie signed to him to stop his horse.

Suddenly he uttered a little cry and leaping from his horse, scrambled up the hillside with a feverish haste and an agility that one would hardly have looked for in one so apparently feeble.

Swiftly he drew himself up by the stumps of trees and inequalities in the precipitous wall of rock, until he reached a place where a huge slab overhung for several feet and stopped his further progress.

The old man was standing on a small ledge immediately under the slab, a hundred feet above the ground. The point for which he was aiming was so far over his head that it would seem as if he never could reach it even were he not met by this apparently insurmountable obstacle, the slab.

"Turn to the right and climb around that stump just over your head," cried Susie, who was watching Old Secrecy's movements with eager eyes.

He looked to the right and saw that it was just possible for him to get above the slab in the way Susie had indicated.

Slowly and carefully he moved to the right. It was a perilous journey. The narrow ledge upon which he stood led over an abyss, the sides of which sloped inward, so that if he had made

a misstep he would have dropped the sheer hundred feet.

The ledge crumbled beneath his feet as he cautiously made his way along, taking advantage of every crack and knob in the wall to hold himself in his place. At last he stood upon a space only a few inches wide, with the great stump of the pine just above him.

The roots of the tree spread in all directions. Most of the straggling "feelers" were decayed so badly that they appeared ready to drop off at the slightest touch.

Old Secrecy was holding by a thick root and uncertain what to do next.

There was no indication of his giving up the task he had set for himself. A thousand feet or so above his head was something that he must reach at whatever risk to himself.

A rag of fluttering cloth attached to a jagged piece of rock!

A piece of Belle Ormsby's blue riding-habit.

Far up as it was, Old Secrecy had recognized it at once. A father's instinct could not be mistaken.

What it meant he could not tell, but that it augured ill for his child he could not doubt.

He cautiously drew himself up by the thick root with his right hand, and then grasped another a little higher with his left. There was no resting-place for his feet, and he hung by his hands over the yawning chasm.

Here he showed that the strength of his youth had not departed, old as he appeared at the first glance.

With a haste that was almost recklessness, he climbed among the roots of the tree, and at last by a superhuman effort, drew himself over the stump, and reached a little resting-place on a rock just above it.

Only just in time! He had hardly disengaged himself from the splinters, twigs and roots of the tree, when the heavy log, breaking loose from the earth that had held it perhaps for centuries, went crashing down to the path below, on which Susie was standing.

"Sakes alive! What are you doing up there?" she ejaculated, as she sprang out of the way. "By gracious, Mr. Ormsby, I thought it was you tumbling down here."

Old Secrecy did not heed her. He was climbing, climbing, climbing toward the little piece of cloth that might give him a clue to the fate of his child.

The clear air had enabled him to distinguish it even from the ground. As he approached it he saw that it was part of the blue riding-habit, and that the rest of the dress lay upon the rocks out of sight from the foot of the mountains, but plainly distinguishable now.

He redoubled his efforts to reach the spot. Occasionally he came to places where it seemed for the moment that he must bring his climb to an end. A vertical wall, with no foothold or grasp save cracks that only an experienced gymnast could utilize. But Old Secrecy seemed to be possessed of miraculous strength and agility, skimming up the face of these precipices, as it appeared to Susie from below, almost like a bird.

He never let the fluttering blue cloth out of his sight. He saw plainly enough now that the whole garment was spread out, apparently to dry.

Could it be possible that Belle was there?

He hardly dared to hope.

One more effort—a wild struggle—and he stood on a ledge of rock with the well-known dress of his daughter in his hand.

The cloth was yet damp, showing that his surmise was probably correct—that it had been laid on the rocks to dry.

He looked around him. The ledge upon which he stood was some six feet wide, fringed with overhanging pines that grew out in all directions, making a sort of fence along the front of the ledge. The rocky wall sloped outward, so that it was impossible to see what might be above, forming, moreover, a slight protection against the sun or rain. The ledge was just at a bend of the mountain, and ran around a corner out of sight.

Old Secrecy held the blue dress in his hand and examined it carefully. It was muddy and torn in several places.

Could it be possible that his daughter had been murdered near this lonely spot?

Maddened with the thought, he ran along the ledge to the place where it turned sharply around the corner.

The ledge got very narrow at this point, but he cared not for that.

He slackened his pace, perforce, a little, but got around safely, to find himself face to face with—Newton Vorce!

CHAPTER XIV.

A LAWYER ON THE WAR-PATH.

WHEN the horses dashed forward with the stage-coach at the report of Jake Drum's pistol, the man who had been sitting by the side of the driver, and who had been compelled by Vorce to move away into the darkness, was leaning carelessly against a pine tree, with his hands in his pockets.

He was a cool sort of fellow. Without arms he knew that he could not do anything against

the road-agents, who probably had half a dozen companions in the thicket. So he just resigned himself to circumstances and waited until a time should arrive when a movement on his part would be productive of good.

"Though," he muttered, "taint like Bob Brace to low himself to be done up in this hyar way, I a'most wish I hadn't joined that thar kid Death-Grip in this thing. It wuz on'y ther hope of gitting my hands on thet Vorce ez made me do it. Durned ef I didn't allers half suspect thet thar feller."

Bob Brace, for he it was, put his hand in one of his pockets in search of a "chaw" of tobacco, when the kicking of the horses and the rattle and bang of the coach made him start.

"By thunder, hyar's some more fun. Wonder ef Death-Grip hez got away from 'em arter all? Jiminy! I wish ez I hed er gun. I'm er durned fool or I'd ha' carried one whar they wouldn't hev suspected it. I knowed the reputation of Lone Pine Gulch, an' ought to ha' been ready for some sich racket ez this. Gosh! Hyar she comes!"

The horses galloped wildly up to him, narrowly escaping dashing the coach into the rocks at the side of the road.

Bob sprung at their heads and managed to catch the bridle of the near leader. With a sudden leap he was on the animal's back.

"Durned ef this don't beat anything I've ever done afore at either cattle or horse herding, an' I've had some purty lively times ez a broucho-buster, too," he thought, as he emitted a shrill "Whoop-e-e-e-e!" in the excitement of the moment, just to let off his rapidly generating steam.

His plan of action was soon formed. Dextrously stepping from one horse to the other, and gathering up the reins that were dragging over the backs of all four, he got them in his left hand in some kind of order, and climbed to the driver's seat on the coach.

The long whip lay on the roof. He seized it, and sending it flying over the now almost uncontrollable horses, let them dash along at the top of their speed, only guiding them in the center of the road.

"I'll block ther game of them fellers yet, whoever they are," he hissed, between his set teeth, as he gave the leaders another cut with the long whip.

Bob Brace knew the road well. His plan had been formed and he would not hesitate in carrying it out to the utmost.

It was six miles to the next station from the place in Lone Pine Gulch where the coach had been stopped.

Could he reach there in an hour, he would get help, come back and run down the robbers. He already more than suspected their identity, and had but little doubt that he could capture them.

"Sich a nice job ez we had, too," he grumbled, as he gave the horses another cut with the whip. "Thet thar Death-Grip is er dandy. Ef we ever get our hands on that thar Vorce I'll vote fer stringing him up ter ther first tree we kin to!"

He had driven on for half an hour—had long since passed out of the Gulch, and was traversing the open plain when he thought, for the first time, of the passengers inside the coach.

"Durn my on'nary picter! Wonder how the old lady is in thar! An' ther man, too. Kim on from Leadville, Yank Storey said. No one knew 'em, or what they wuz after. Queer sort o' people! Never took any notice uv ther racket in ther gulch, either. Both asleep, eh?"

The fresh air of morning was blowing across his face, and the mysterious light that comes from no one knows where on an open space enabled him to see the track along which he was driving.

"Whoa-a-a! I'll hev ter look inside an' see how they are gitting on!"

He pulled up the horses and was stepping down from the roof, when a man's voice from inside the coach broke out in sharp, querulous tones.

"Say, there, driver, what does all this mean? Have those rascally robbers gone yet! It's a nice thing if a lady and gentleman cannot travel in the United States without being annoyed by a set of scoundrels who should be in the penitentiary. I'll make an information against this stage company as soon as I get to Denver for harboring suspicious characters. I believe the company and the thieves and the drivers are all in the conspiracy together. It is perfectly disgraceful, but they have tackled the wrong man this time, I can assure you, my honest friend."

The speaker's head was out of the coach window and he nodded it to emphasize his remarks. It was too dark to distinguish his features very well, but Bob could see that the face was large, round and red, that the hair surrounding it, consisting of a fringe over his forehead and another down his cheeks and under his chin, was white, and that there was a good-sized bald spot on top of his head.

"What in thunder air yer talking about? Who air yer, anyhow?" asked Bob.

"Who am I? Well, I'll tell you who I am. I'm a lawyer practicing in Chicago. My name

is Quick—Silas Quick, of the firm of Quick & Slamm, Chicago, Illinois. I'm out in Colorado on business for my client—this lady sitting opposite me in the coach, and who has been going out of one fainting-fit into another ever since we left Silver Creek, or whatever you call that heathenish place where we changed horses."

Mr. Quick snapped out all this with great volubility and shrillness, his bald head looking like a very pale moon amid the gloom.

"Why didn't yer help some when we got held up in Lone Pine Gulch back thar?" growled Bob.

"No, sir! No, sir! Not for Silas Quick! It wasn't my case! I never interfere until I have received a retaining fee. I'm not in the thief-catching business here. But if one of those blackguards had interfered with my client or myself they would speedily have found themselves defendants in a suit for pointing deadly weapons, another for felonious assault and battery, another for highway robbery, another for surety of the peace, another for—"

"Ef you hed been a little handy with er gun, it 'ud ha' been the best suit yer could have brought. Talkin' 'bout law, it don't amount ter much with road-agents when they hev ther drop on yer."

"Young man, you don't know the power of the law, or you would not talk in that way."

"Praps so. Is ther lady all right?"

"The lady is not all right, but she is anxious to get to the next stage. So drive on."

"All right, pard," answered Bob, carelessly, as he touched up his horses and rattled over the plain.

"I'll make some of these people feel the weight of the law," grumbled Mr. Quick, drawing in his head. "How do you feel now, Mrs. —"

"Hush! Do not mention my name," answered the lady, putting out her hand as if to stop the lawyer's mouth.

"Don't be afraid, Mrs.—Smith. Quick & Slamm would never have reached their present eminent position as the most successful law firm in Illinois if they did not possess the qualities of circumspection and discretion."

"The words mean about the same, do they not, Mr. Quick?" asked the lady in a slightly amused tone.

"Perhaps they do, madam, in English. I am accustomed to stating the maxims of the law in Latin, however, in which grand old language, madam, the tautological objection would not hold good."

Mr. Quick winked complacently to himself as he discharged this volley of big words at his client, and then felt in all his pockets for something.

"By the powers! Surely I cannot have lost it," he exclaimed, half to himself.

"What?" asked his companion.

"Nothing particular, Mrs.—Smith. I have it. It is all right."

In the darkness a suspicious "glug-glug-glug" could be heard, and an aroma of brandy filled the coach.

"Ah!" sighed Silas.

"Mr. Quick, have you such a thing as a little brandy? I feel rather faint still," said the lady, quietly, after a pause.

"Er—er! Brandy, did you say? Why—er—er—I hardly know. I'll see. Perhaps I have."

With a great deal of fuss and bustle, Mr. Quick drew forth a small spirit lamp and lighted it.

The lady was now seen to be a handsome woman of past middle age, with a determined face, surmounted by wavy gray hair. She was plainly but richly dressed, and the glitter of a diamond-ring on her ungloved right hand was revealed at every movement.

Mr. Quick, with a little more fumbling, produced a flask, from which he poured into a small wine-glass a little brandy.

The lady drank it with the manner of one who was determined to keep up her strength at any cost.

"We must stay in Denver until we hear something of him," she said, as if resuming a conversation, although she had exchanged hardly a word with her companion for four or five hours. He was in Denver two years ago, and from thence he was traced to Leadville, where it was supposed he was living. They did not know anything about him there, however."

"I don't know so much about that," said the lawyer. "I don't trust those mining fellows. They may have had reasons for concealing the truth. He may have been right among them for all we could tell. He is suspected of a crime, and is supposed to be a refugee from justice. That would be enough for them. They have a fellow-feeling for him—(I mean some of course)—and if they knew where Grant Ormsby was to be found they were not going to tell."

"He has probably changed his name," suggested the lady.

"Most likely. A man, when he believes himself to be a murderer, and doesn't want to be hanged, sees at once that a change of name is prudent to say the least."

"Well, I must find Grant Ormsby, if it takes me all the rest of my life," sighed the lady, wearily.

"Quite so," assented Mr. Quick, as he turned out the spirit lamp and refreshed himself with another application to the flask.

"The robbers secured the chest of Wells, Fargo & Co. you tell me?" observed the lady.

"Yes."

"I fainted as soon as I heard the noise. Did they attempt to rob the passengers?"

"No, Mrs.—Smith. And it was a good thing for them that they did not."

"And for us too, perhaps," added the lady, dryly.

"Hullo! Here are the lights of the hotel. We must have got to the end of the stage," said the lawyer, looking out of the window.

With a yell, and a rattle, the driver drew the coach up to the door of a house that might have been a twin-brother of the Silver Creek Tavern.

Jumping from his perch, Bob Brace ran into the house and told his story in a few hurried words to the apathetic fat-faced landlord, while the hostler was changing the horses in the coach.

"Yank Storey wuz took sick at Silver Creek, an' we left him thar. I happened ter be in ther town, an' I engineered ther old coach over hyar fer him. We got held up in Lone Pine Gulch an' er feller ez we call Dick Young, or Death-Grip, whichever you like, who wuz er drivin' fer me through the Gulch, he wuz pulled off'n ther coach and held back. The treasure-chest wuz taken too. Then I see'd ez no one wuz er lookin' an' I brought ther coach over by myself."

"Well?" said the fat landlord, leaning against the doorpost and hitching his pistol around to get it out of his way at his belt.

"Wal," continued Bob, "I hev an idee ez I kin track them agents. But I want some help. Is thar any one 'round hyar ez'll go?"

"Dunno," grunted the apathetic landlord.

"Thar's plenty of horses in the stable. You kin take what yer want, an' leave 'em with Susie Vorce at Silver Creek ef yer don't want ter kin back hyar."

"Durn the horses. I want men."

"I'll lend yer some pistols an' er knife," continued the landlord, ignoring Bob Brace's last remark, as he handed him a pair of six-shooters and a bowie-knife.

Bob took the pistols, and saw that they were charged in every chamber, and placed them in his belt, with the knife.

"Now, what am I to do for men?" he asked, as he looked thoughtfully at the apathetic landlord.

"Hullo, Bob," said a cheery voice behind him. "What now, pardner?"

"Jack Noble!"

"Ther same, Bob."

"What are yer doin' hyar?"

"Never mind. I heerd what yer said, an' I'm with yer; that's all."

"Good! Now, ef I could git just one more sech a man I wouldn't keer," exclaimed Bob.

"Three is all I want to stir up that thar nest of snakes back in Lone Pine Gulch. Whar can I find a good man, with a quick finger on ther trigger in er scuffle, and who don't skeer at nothin'?"

"Here's your man!" cried the voice of Lawyer Quick, of the firm of Quick & Slamm, Chicago, Illinois. "Here's the very man you want!"

"Where?" asked Bob, looking around him.

"Here."

"You?"

"Yes, me. I just want to get one chance at those fellows in a fair fight with weapons. After that I want to get them into court, and I'll skin 'em alive."

The lawyer ground his teeth, and Brace saw that he was in earnest.

"I'll go you!" was all he said.

CHAPTER XV.

A SECRET FOE IN AMBUSH.

LAWYER QUICK ushered into the hotel the lady with whom he had been traveling, and gave her a chair.

"Landlord," she said, with the imperious manner of a woman accustomed to being obeyed.

"Yes, mum," answered the apathetic landlord, becoming almost lively for an instant.

"I shall stay here for a day or two. Show me a room."

"Cert'nly, mum." Then, bawling out of a door in the rear: "Sophy, come here and show this lady to a room."

The wife of the landlord, who was as active as her husband was slow, took the lady under her wing and led her away.

"Take care the lady has every attention while she's here," said Mr. Quick. "She can pay for it."

"Say, Jim, I don't see no use sending ther coach any funder now. Thar's no passengers aboard, an' the treasure-chest hez been snaked. Better hold her hyar till ye hear from us, hadn't yer?" asked Bob Brace.

"No, sir," answered the landlord, with dignity. "That coach is carrying the United States mails, and I am not going to take the responsibility of holding it back. My hostler can drive it to the next stage, and then, if the

fellow there likes to hold it, why it will be his business, and not mine."

This was an unusually long speech for the fat landlord. It apparently tired him out, for after nodding to his hostler, he took a seat in his own particular wooden arm-chair, and did not speak again.

"Now, boys, mount, and come 'long!" said Bob, as he walked to the front of the house, where three wiry mustangs, ready saddled, had been already brought out under his own direction.

"I don't know about these small horses. I am afraid that animal can hardly sustain my weight," objected Mr. Quick.

"How much d'ye weigh?" asked Bob.

"About 140 pounds."

"Git up. You're all right."

The lawyer did as he was told, though not without some misgivings.

The broncho was rather fresh, and began bucking in a lively manner, until at last he sat Mr. Quick on the ground with a painful jolt.

The lawyer got up boiling over with rage.

"Give me a whip!" he yelled.

Jack Noble exchanged a wink with Brace, and handed his quirt to the furious Quick.

"Confound you! I'll make you show cause of action!" he roared, as he seized the bridle of the horse with his left hand and thrashed him soundly with the whip in his right. "I'll make an injunction to issue forthwith. I'll attach you in every inch of your hide! I'll kill you and make the jury call it justifiable homicide. I'll teach you to play tricks with a member of the bar!"

As he spluttered each sentence, he redoubled his punishment of the horse, until the animal was completely cowed.

"Bravo, lawyer! Durned ef you ain't er reg'lar broncho-buster! Ef yer ever want er job at breakin' in er horse, come to Bob Brace an' you shall hev it, at full wages, and an outfit thrown in!" yelled the delighted cowboy.

"Git on him now, lawyer, he's safe enough," said Jack Noble.

Silas Quick, with a triumphant air, handed the whip to the young man and threw himself into his saddle. Sure enough, the mustang did not offer any objection to the weight of his rider now, and the lawyer sat comfortably waiting for his companions.

It was rapidly getting light, and the fresh, invigorating air of the morning was calculated to make any one enjoy an adventure that had a spice of danger.

"Got any pistols, lawyer?" asked Bob.

"I have, young man. I am always armed."

He opened his Prince Albert coat as he spoke, and showed that in a belt he had two six-chambered Colts and a bowie-knife. Then he buttoned up his coat again, and with his white necktie and white plug hat with black band, looked just what it was his pride to be—a prosperous lawyer in that most prosperous city, yelegant Chicago.

The three men did not talk much as they rode along. Bob Brace led the way, and the other two followed in single file.

"Hyar's ther place," said Bob, at last, as they reached the narrow defile, by the side of the thicket of pines. "It's er dull place even in daylight, eh, pardner?"

Bob evidently addressed Mr. Quick, and the lawyer nodded, though he felt disposed in his secret heart to resent being familiarly addressed as "pardner."

It was broad daylight now, and the pines stood out in clear relief against the precipitous sides of the mountain, running up thousands of feet toward the blue sky.

The gorge was so narrow that the daylight was considerably lessened by the time it reached the ground even in the middle of the road, while in the thicket the gloom was so deep that nothing could be discerned there with any certainty.

Bob Brace had sprung from his saddle as he spoke, and was looking at the ground near the pines as if in search of something.

"See hyar, lawyer; hyar's whar ther coach was held up. Look at ther marks of ther horses' hoofs whar they slid in ther mud ez Death-Grip pulled 'em up."

"Death-Grip?" repeated the lawyer, questioningly.

"Yes, that wuz ther name of ther driver."

"Oh!"

"An' hyar wuz whar they threw down ther box consigned to Wells-Fargo," continued Bob, as he pointed to a dent on the road. "It wuz er pretty heavy box, don't yer see, an' I s'pose hed plenty uv dust in it. Now, ther next question is: Whar is it now?"

"Thet's whar," acquiesced Jack Noble, who was getting a little tired of the other's oratory. "S'pose we look fer ther box, an' quit speechifyin'."

"Wal, now, hyar's whar it wuz dragged right away from ther road, inter ther thicket hyar, an'—an'— Wal, by gracious! I can't see whar it wuz took then."

Bob Brace was examining the ground closely. He had easily traced the course of the chest to the foot of one of the pines, it having made a very plain furrow. But there it suddenly stopped.

"Don't see how he could ha' lifted it an' car-

ried it from hyar. Don't see why he would do it, anyhow. Ther most nat'ral thing fer er man ter do would be to break open ther box, take out what he wanted, an' leave what he didn't in it ter be picked up by ther coach ther next time it kim along. That's ther gentlemanly thing ter do, an' ther way I've allers seen it."

Jack Noble had dismounted and was standing by Brace's side looking at the tracks of the chest. Mr. Quick remained on his horse's back, apparently in a reverie, and was not troubling himself about anything in his immediate neighborhood.

"Say, lawyer, come down hyar an' help," said Brace. "You're in ther bizness of puzzlin' out things, an' this hyar's right in your line."

Without a word Mr. Quick rolled solemnly out of his saddle and trotted over to his companions.

"What d'ye make uv it?" asked Brace, when the lawyer had gravely scanned the ground, looked up into the trees and scratched his head until his white hat with the black band had been knocked over his left eye.

"Wait a moment. Are you asking me my opinion as a lawyer—"

"Yes—yes—anything," broke in Bob Brace, impatiently.

"Very well; then it will cost you ten dollars. That is the fee demanded by Quick & Slamm for a professional opinion."

Jack Noble grinned and suggested that perhaps Mr. Quick's opinion as a citizen only would not be quite so expensive.

"Right, young man. I will give my opinion as a simple citizen free of cost and with the greatest of pleasure."

"Go ahead, then, for grashus sake!" cried Bob Brace, fervently.

"Suppose you climb this tree."

"What fer?"

"You asked my advice, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. My advice is to climb this tree."

The two cowboys looked up at the tree, and noted that it was very large, was blasted by lightning some twelve feet above the ground, and was almost without branches.

"Hollow?" queried Bob Brace, kicking the trunk with his heavy boot.

"I think so," was Silas Quick's terse reply.

Jack Noble did not speak, but clasping the big pine with both arms, he shinned rapidly up until he was able to look over the top.

"Hollow down to the ground," he proclaimed.

"I thought so," observed Quick, as he examined the trunk near the ground with close scrutiny.

He picked off a piece of the bark with the point of his knife and found a crack that he traced some three feet up and down, and about the same distance at right angles at top and bottom of the vertical line.

"Very ingenious, no doubt," he muttered. "But if these gentry among the mountains of Colorado think that they are a match for Messrs Quick & Slamm, of Chicago, Illinois, they will find themselves very much mistaken."

The two cowboys were watching the lawyer poking at the tree with much interest, and saw, as soon as he did the key to the mysterious disappearance of the chest.

"That's whar he's hid ther box, of course," ejaculated Bob, as he tried to pry open with his knife that part of the bark surrounded by the crack.

"It's got to be open by main strength, I guess, Bob," observed Jack Noble, going to the assistance of his brother cowboy.

"I expect so," agreed Silas Quick, in absent-minded tones, for he was looking about something else, and was thinking earnestly into the depths of the pine thicket.

"If the box is in there, as no doubt it is," he thought, "there is a chance of the thieves not being far away."

He unbuttoned his coat to feel if his pistols were ready to his hand in his belt, and with his white hat jammed firmly down over his brows, plunged into the clump of pines.

The underbrush impeded his progress a great deal, but he forced his way through it, grumbling to himself in his own characteristic way as he went along.

"Confound this country!" he growled. "To think of the senior member of the great law firm of Quick & Slamm digging around among tress and bushes in the wilds of Colorado, when he ought to be in his office in Chicago! If it wasn't such an interesting case, I wouldn't think of doing it. But I'm going to find Grant Ormsby and that girl, if it takes me a year. There is enough money in it for the firm to make it worth my while, but that is not everything. It is a case that, if successfully brought to an issue, will make the name of Quick & Slamm as familiar in London, Paris, Berlin and New York, as it is in Chicago. Two million dollars for the daughter of Grant Ormsby, and luxury for the old man himself for the rest of his life! Whew! It's a big thing—a big thing!"

He had been pegging along as he thought thus, until he was all in a perspiration. He stopped and wiped his face with a large, yellow silk handkerchief.

"Ah!" he sighed. "Her present! I believe she does like me a little, and that she means to keep her promise to become Mrs. Quick if this search is successful! Well, I'll win her, if there is anything in perseverance. What a handsome couple we would make!"

He chuckled aloud at the notion, and was walking along, pushing the tiresome branches aside mechanically, when two pistol-shots rung out, almost simultaneously, in the direction from which he had come, followed a moment afterward by another.

Silas Quick jumped at each report, after the manner of a man not used to the sound of firearms.

"What the deuce is going on there?" he said. "Somebody must have dropped upon my two cowboy friends—somebody on the opposite side of the case, with a weight of evidence. I hope nobody is hurt. I'll have to go and see."

He retraced his steps as rapidly as he could through the dense undergrowth, until he reached the open space around the Lone Pine. He had no sooner got there than a long rope came flying toward him from the dark thicket on the opposite side, and a noose, tightening itself about his body and arms, threw him violently to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI.

JAKE DRUM AND HIS PRISONER.

MR. QUICK'S first emotion, when he found himself so unceremoniously brought to earth, was unqualified indignation.

He struggled to regain his feet, but at every attempt the rope tightened with a jerk, and he was rendered helpless, to say nothing of feeling the cords cutting into his flesh and causing him excruciating pain.

He found that he was indeed in the toils of some enemy, and decided that the opposite parties, having all the witnesses, as well as judge and jury, on their side, the best thing for him to do was to confess himself beaten as gracefully as he could.

"Though," he muttered, "I should like to have this fellow in court in Chicago for half an hour, I'd prove every crime in the calendar against him, and send him to State Prison for fifty years."

"Good-morning, sir," croaked a harsh voice in his ear at this moment.

The lawyer turned over and looked up.

A man was standing over him, holding the rope in his hand, and carelessly pointing a six-shooter at his head.

"Newton Vorce, by all that's lucky!" thought Silas Quick, without moving a muscle of his face. "And he thinks I don't know him."

"Good-morning, sir," repeated Vorce.

"Good-morning," answered the lawyer, coolly.

"Isn't it time that you got up, sir?"

"Well, yes, I expect it is, especially as my bed is not very comfortable," returned Quick.

"You're er cool 'un," observed Vorce, with a rough sort of admiration.

"Yes, I am cool. This is a very damp place. I'm afraid that my rheumatism will trouble me before night."

The desperado looked at the lawyer as if he hardly understood him, and the lawyer looked at the desperado with an expression of utter unconcern.

Mr. Quick's white hat had fallen off and his usually neat white necktie was somewhat rumpled; otherwise he was as unruffled as he appeared any morning in the Chicago criminal court during the term.

"Get up!" commanded Vorce.

"Loosen this confounded rope and give me a chance," answered the lawyer.

The other, for answer, seized his prisoner by the coat, between the shoulders, still with the rope tight around his body, and lifted him to his feet as if he had been a small child.

"March!" commanded Vorce.

"Which way?"

"Ther way you wuz going afore you turned around when you heard ther shots."

"How do you know which way I was going?"

"I've been watchin' yer ever since you hev been hyar."

"The deuce you have!" ejaculated Mr. Quick, in genuine surprise. "Where were you?"

"None uv your bizness."

"Well, will you please tell me who fired those shots just now?"

Vorce laughed grimly.

"I fired two uv 'em," he answered, "an' er durned fool fired ther other. I tell you, stranger, ther man ez thinks he kin catch me asleep hed better sharpen his weapons."

"Anybody hurt by those shots?" asked Quick, as coolly as he could.

"Now, see hyar, stranger. When I want ter talk you'll hear me. But I don't 'low no one to pump me, you onderstand."

The lawyer was a shrewd man and a judge of human nature. He did understand, and said so, at the same time walking through the brushwood in the direction pointed out by Vorce.

"It's a queer thing, this," muttered the lawyer. "Here I have stumbled upon the very man who can help me to find Grant Ormsby, if any one can, and who is himself wanted in Chi-

cago, to answer to that old charge. Silas Quick, you are in luck, if you get out of this scrape alive."

"What are yer growlin' about?" croaked Vorce, as he gave the rope a warning jerk. "Git on thar, an' stop makin' er noise with yer mouth."

"Oh!" thought Silas. "Then there must be assistance close at hand. He is afraid of attracting attention. If I didn't want to find out just what Newton Vorce is doing around here, and how much he knows about Grant Ormsby, I would give one wild yell, just to see what the effect would be."

A few more steps and they had reached the edge of the pine thicket, on the opposite side from the road, and some hundred yards down the defile from where the marks of the chest had been found by Quick and his companions.

He glanced hastily back, on the slight chance of seeing something of Bob and Jack.

"Quit that!" commanded Vorce, with another jerk of the rope. "Look straight ahead!"

"You seem to have a mortgage on my vision, sir; but I don't think you need foreclose quite so promptly," grumbled Quick, as he shook his head to make the white hat fit more comfortably on the back of the bald spot.

"Great Blackstone's ghost!" he continued, starting back. "What's that?"

"What's what?" answered another voice, as the red hair of Jake Drum bobbed up from behind Newton Vorce. "You're rather disrespectful, sir."

Jake was very much displeased at the lawyer's attitude of comic surprise, albeit the figure of the little man, with his boy's shirt-waist, kneepants and red necktie, generally provoked astonishment when looked at for the first time.

"Take care uv him, Jake," commanded Vorce. "I will ride ahead faster. I hev other business to look after. You'll find me at Number 2."

"Shall I bring this thing up there?"

It was now Silas Quick's turn to be indignant.

"What do you mean, sir, by 'this thing'?" Do you know who I am, sir. If I had you in Chicago, I'd—"

"There's your horse. Mount!" said Jake, briefly, cutting short the lawyer's trade.

"My—my—horse?"

"Yes, don't you know him again?"

Sure enough, the mustang upon which he had ridden from the hotel that morning, and which he had left on the other side of the thicket, was standing quietly before him, with another horse, the property of Jake Drum by his side.

"I am getting more surprises every day that I stay out in this wild country," declared Silas Quick. "Your friend, with the soft voice and wild demeanor, has gone, too, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he couldn't spare all the morning to listen to the chattering of a fool—even a Chicago fool," returned Jake, in vinegary tones. "But you won't be lonesome; I'll bear you company to the place we are going to."

It was as the lawyer had said. Vorce had thrown himself into the saddle of his great black horse, Demon, which had obediently come forth from a clump of trees at his owner's call, and giving the rope that secured the lawyer into Drum's hands, had galloped away, and was lost to sight almost immediately.

"It will be rather hard for me to get on a horse while you are holding my arms tightly at my sides with that villainous rope!" grumbled Quick.

"I'll loosen it a little," said Jake Drum, as he slackened the slip-knot enough to give the lawyer a slight control of his arms.

Quick managed to get on his horse's back, but was nearly thrown off again by the vixenish animal kicking up his heels and "bucking" in a wild way.

The lawyer dug his heels into the horse's sides and gripped him with his knees with all his strength.

"Just take this rope off me for a minute and lend me your whip, and I'll show you a trick with this horse that it will be worth your while to see."

"I guess so," was Jake Drum's dry response, as he picked up the white hat with the black band and stuck it firmly on the lawyer's head. Then he mounted his own horse, and still holding the rope firmly attached to Quick, rode rapidly down the gulch, dragging the lawyer with him.

Mr. Quick was jerked and shaken about in a most distressing way. His hands being fastened to his side, he could not control the animal, but had to use his knees as his only guide.

Jake kept on turning around and grinning with an aggravating enjoyment of the lawyer's discomfiture that made that gentleman swell and perspire with rage.

"I am glad to see that you appreciate the beauties of a morning ride, sir," said Jake Drum, with much politeness.

"I should appreciate them better if I were not compelled to ride in company with a fool, sir," replied the lawyer, tartly.

The response to this sally was a jerk at the rope that nearly dragged Mr. Quick from his saddle.

"Confound you!" growled the lawyer, between his teeth. Then a gleam of satisfaction shone in his eyes, and he did not say any more.

Jake Drum, as we have seen, was very sensitive to ridicule. Being called a fool, even by a stranger, was not very soothing to his vanity, so he did not attempt to continue the conversation with his companion.

He kept in the lead, holding the long rope in his right hand, with two or three turns around his wrist, and contented himself with glancing over his shoulder occasionally to make sure that his prisoner was all right.

Suddenly, a blow on the back of his head made him reel in his saddle, and the rope dropped out of his hand.

He recovered himself immediately and put his hand to his belt, but a fierce voice that he hardly recognized as belonging to the lawyer, yelled:

"Throw up your hands!"

Instinctively he obeyed. Such a command in a lonely spot in the neighborhood of the Rockies, is not to be disregarded.

"Hold them higher, you sneak-thieving rascal, or I'll put you where a writ of habeas corpus will never help your case!" cried Mr. Quick's voice.

Jake Drum tried to put his hands a little higher, and then ventured to look around.

What he saw was hardly calculated to reassure him.

Mr. Quick, with the noose of the lariat loosened and hanging about his waist, had his six-shooter in his right hand, pointed straight at Jake Drum's head, while a bowie-knife in his left hand threatened to complete Mr. Drum's vanquishment if the revolver should fail.

"Now, you blackguard, I'll just run you right into the next town—Silver Creek or whatever it is," declared the lawyer. "When Silas Quick is caught like a rat in a trap, it is by some one smarter than you, rest assured."

Jake did not condescend to answer. He saw that he was at a disadvantage, and he did not care to waste his breath.

"I should like to smoke a cigar on my way," he remarked, after a pause.

"Well, smoke."

"Have you a cigar?"

The lawyer grinned. He had a keen appreciation of humor, and he rather enjoyed this exhibition of impudence on the part of the funny little man with the red hair.

"Perhaps you would like a drink, too?"

"I don't mind."

"Well, there is something left in my flask, but it is on the ground over there. I took the liberty of throwing it at your head just now," said Quick.

"It reached the mark, too," was Jake's rueful response, as he put one of his hands to the back of his head and rubbed it.

"Here! Hands up!" admonished the lawyer. Jake put his hand up over his head again, and muttered an oath under his breath.

"Will you let me pick up that flask?" he asked, sullenly.

The lawyer reflected for a moment, and then gave his consent.

Jake rolled off his horse, still with his hands up and with the lawyer following him with his pistol, strolled toward the flask, which was just under the head of Quick's horse.

Silas was watching him jealously.

"Keep your hands up," he commanded.

"How am I to pick up the flask with my hands over my head?"

"True. I never thought of that. Pick it up, and—remember that I am watching you!"

"All right."

Jake dropped on his knees, grasped the flask, and then, quick as a flash, drew his pistol, and with a well-aimed shot sent the lawyer's revolver flying from his hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS.

We left Death-Grip lying on his back, by the side of the Leadville coach, with Newton Vorce's fingers on his throat.

The two men recognized each other simultaneously, and each made an extra effort to overcome the other.

Vorce had the best of the struggle, however, and as he forced the young detective down, the desperado pressed his knee into his chest and held him immovable and helpless.

"Now, my young tenderfoot, I guess ez your time hez come," hissed Vorce, through his set teeth.

"Indeed? I don't know that," returned Death-Grip, carelessly.

The tone caused Vorce to boil over.

"I'll soon make you know it! I'm a-goin' to kill yer right hyar," snarled the desperado.

"Don't you do it. It will be dangerous!"

"To you? Yes, in course."

"No; dangerous to you. Belle Ormsby—"

"Curse yer! Don't yer dare to say thet thar gal's name," howled Vorce. "She is ter be my wife. She's promised ter me."

"You scoundrel! Do you mean to say that you are going to marry the girl that you know you have murdered?"

"Murdered!"

Newton Vorce felt a cold thrill pass through him at the word, and the perspiration fell from his forehead and trickled down his cheeks in his mental agony.

It was at this time that the coach horses ran away with the stage, but he did not notice them.

"You know," continued Death-Grip, "that you threw that girl over the cliff outside your dug-out!"

"It's a lie," broke in Vorce. "I haven't seen her for two days."

"For two days?"

"Yes. She fell over ther rocks by accident. I tried ter save her—"

"You tried to save her! And yet you have not seen her for two days. She fell over only last night."

Vorce tried to cover up his mistake by bluster.

"It ain't none uv your business what I done, or when I seen ther gal last. You ain't got nothin' to do with her, anyhow."

While talking, the desperado had unconsciously loosened his hold upon the young man.

Death-Grip was not slow to take advantage of the circumstance.

With a violent effort, he released himself from Vorce's grasp, and tried to throw his foe upon his back.

But the other was too quick for him. He twined like an eel, and before Death-Grip could divine his intention, was behind a tree.

The young detective knew the desperate nature of the man with whom he had to deal, and quickly sought refuge behind another tree.

It was very dark, but the two men had each a pretty correct idea of the position of the other.

Both were armed with six-shooters, but both were unwilling to use them. The flash would surely betray the exact locality of the shooter, while the shot would more than likely fail to reach its mark.

"Curse that fellow!" thought Death-Grip. "If I could only catch him alive! It seems to me that every time I get near him, I am so situated that I cannot take advantage of my good luck."

The voice of Vorce broke in upon his meditations.

"Wal, young feller, what's er gwine ter be ther end uv this?"

Death-Grip did not answer. He was too busy thinking.

For a minute or two there was silence, only broken by the now distant rumbling of the coach wheels, and by the rustling of the trees as they bent slightly under the pressure of the gentle morning breeze.

The darkest hour is before the dawn, and the gloom was very thick in this deep canyon, with its tall pines skirting the roadway.

Each of the two men was actuated by the strongest incentives to overcome the other. On the part of Vorce an insane jealousy and hatred, begotten of the young man's success in winning the favor of Belle Ormsby, and on the part of Death-Grip the desire to place in the hands of the law a man who had made his name notorious throughout the length and breadth of Colorado.

The young detective's brain worked quickly, and he had soon hit upon a plan to overcome his foe—dangerous, it is true, but which seemed the only one to be adopted under the circumstances.

Between the tree that sheltered Death-Grip and that behind which Vorce stood there was a space of about ten yards.

Though, as has been said, it was very dark, it would have been possible to distinguish any moving figure in this open space. And yet Death-Grip knew that his only hope of capturing the desperado was by getting behind him.

Grasping his revolver firmly in his right hand the young fellow dropped flat upon his stomach and Indian fashion, began to wriggle along the ground toward Newt Vorce's tree.

The sound of the coach-wheels had died away by this time, and a death-like stillness hung over Lone Pine Gulch.

Slowly Death-Grip covered the distance between the trees. Foot by foot he went along, becoming more and more cautious, the nearer he got toward his enemy.

Careful as he might be, he could not help making a rustling as he passed along that might arouse the suspicions of the desperado at any moment.

Ah! Now he could just distinguish the outlines of Vorce's figure, not quite hidden by the tree.

"How easily I could put a bullet through him from here," thought the detective, as he poised his revolver with the muzzle pointed directly at the other's breast. "If I thought I couldn't take him, alive now I would pull the trigger, as sure as I am here."

The detective smiled to himself as he thus thought, and shaking his head knowingly, determined to take his prey without having recourse to extreme measures.

"A live Vorce is worth a dozen dead ones in the eyes of the law, and the sheriff shall deal

with the gentleman in his own way if I can manage it for him," he muttered.

He lay still for a moment watching Vorce, who maintained a rigid attitude behind the tree.

It was only by putting his head sideways and getting a certain angle of view of the desperado that Death-Grip could manage to see him at all. He was compelled to get the figure in silhouette against the sky when a shadow that took the form of Vorce, could, by a strain of vision, just be discerned.

The young detective, lying on the ground, was absolutely invisible.

"How still he is! I cannot see him stir in the slightest degree," muttered Death-Grip. "I am afraid it means mischief."

Slowly and noiselessly the young man wormed himself along, until he had passed the tree on the left and lay abreast of it, but some two yards away. There was not another tree within a dozen yards on the other side. In fact, Vorce had taken refuge behind the solitary pine that gave its name to the gulch.

"Now for it! I must not make a failure this time, or it will be all up with Mr. Richard Young," was the reflection of the detective, as he got behind Vorce and lay for a moment gathering his strength for the impending struggle.

Still the man in his ambush behind the tree did not move. He might have been a statue, so stiffly did he stand against the trunk of the pine. But that Death-Grip could actually see him, he would have doubted whether there really was a man there.

Death-Grip felt that his knife was in his belt, ready to be grasped by his left hand, and with his pistol ready for instant action in his right, he slowly and silently raised himself to his knees and then to his feet.

A pair of bright steel handcuffs, made on a patent principle, by which they could be snapped upon the wrists of a captive much quicker and easier than the ordinary rather clumsy manacles, were hanging to his belt, by the side of the knife. The detective was determined that he would not fail in the capture for any lack of preparation.

Vorce was so near to him now that he could almost touch him, and still he did not move.

Death-Grip was holding his breath, afraid that even the slightest noise of respiration might warn his intended prisoner of the approach of his enemy.

Once the young detective put forth his hand as if with the intention of seizing the other by the neck, but he drew it back as a better plan suggested itself to him.

Grasping his heavy six-shooter by the barrel, he swung it over his head and brought the butt of it with tremendous force upon what he supposed was the shoulder of the desperado.

A stinging sensation ran up Death-Grip's arm to the elbow, causing him to drop the pistol and utter an involuntary exclamation.

Then he rushed at his foe and tried to bear him to the earth.

He had hardly touched him before he started back with a cry of utter disgust and disappointment.

"Well, of all the fools that ever left a college thinking he knew it all, Dick Young, late of Yale, is the worst, I do believe!"

He kicked the trunk of the lone pine and scratched his head with both hands in the extremity of his chagrin.

What he supposed was Newt Vorce hiding behind the lone pine, was nothing but a dead limb of the tree that had become loosened from the parent stem and half hung, half lay on the ground, bearing, in the thick darkness, a fantastic resemblance to the form of a man.

This it was that Death-Grip had been watching from the time that he crawled away from his own tree with such elaborate caution, and this it was that he had struck so viciously with his pistol, with the sole effect of stunning his own arm.

But where was Vorce?

He had certainly been behind the tree when he broke away from the detective's clutches, and it seemed almost impossible that he could have got away without betraying himself to Death-Grip's sharp ears and eyes.

He had been behind the tree when he spoke to the detective, and the latter had kept his eye on the tree ever since, so closely that it seemed as if Vorce could not have left without detection, in spite of the darkness.

Death-Grip picked up his pistol, after groping around for it a little, and tried to make up his mind what to do next. Vorce might be somewhere close at hand, notwithstanding that he had sneaked away from his shelter behind the lone pine. The young man knew too well the desperate nature of the man to take any chances on a stray bullet.

"He evidently has sense enough to know that he cannot afford to kill me just now," thought the detective. "He suspects that the officers are pretty closely on his track, and he realizes that putting me out of the way would only make the pursuit of him still hotter. Still, he might shoot, if he had me comfortably in range."

Death-Grip slowly made his way through the

thicket of pines to the rocky mountain wall behind. He argued that Vorce must have gone this way, if he had left the thicket at all, because he could not have reached the roadway without passing near enough to the detective to have given him a hint of his presence.

As has been said, the mountain arose almost perpendicularly from the right-hand side of Lone Pine Gulch, forming a complete bar to any further progress in that direction.

It was Death-Grip's object to get some idea of Newt Vorce's retreat in this locality, so that he could return under more favorable circumstances and secure his prisoner. He knew too well that at present he would be worse than powerless.

"It is no use my dodging around here in the dark, like a blind cat in a cellar," he muttered.

"I must have some light, even if it draws a shot from Vorce."

He took out his electric lantern as he spoke and turned on the current.

In the darkness, he had been unable to grasp the lantern in exactly the position he intended. As a consequence, when the bright, though small light, burst forth, it shone full on his own face.

He turned it around instantly, but evidently not quickly enough to prevent his features from being recognized by some one, for a voice, that thrilled him to the very soul, cried, in accents of deep distress:

"Death-Grip! Death-Grip!"

He started as if he had been galvanized.

"Belle Ormsby's voice!" he gasped, buskily. Then, repressing his first impulse to answer her, on he realized that such an act would put Vorce on his guard, he scrambled up the steep mountain-side with the agility of a wild-cat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAWYER QUICK FINDS OLD SECRECY.

WHEN Old Secrecy met Newton Vorce so unexpectedly on the mountain his first impulse was to fly at the desperado's throat.

"Where is Belle?" he demanded, hoarsely.

Vorce frowned.

"How should I know?" he growled.

"Newton Vorce, you know that you stole her away from her home while I was busy at your devilish work in the laboratory. You know—"

Vorce looked around him as if afraid that they might be overheard. Then putting his hand over the old man's mouth, he hissed:

"If you don't keep that mouth of yours still, I'll choke yer."

He dragged Old Secrecy into a little recess and looked into his eyes with an expression that meant murder as plainly as a look could show it.

"Where is Belle?" was all the other could say.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No. I hev'n't seen her since last night."

"You saw her then?"

"Yes, I did," returned Vorce, doggedly. "But like gals in general, she didn't know when she was all right. So she went flying off in the dark, and may hev fallen over ther bluff an' broken her neck fur all ez I know."

Old Secrecy looked into the face of the desperado as he said this in a cool matter-of-fact way, as if he doubted whether he heard aright.

"Newt Vorce, do you mean to say that you let Belle fall into danger without putting out a hand to save her?"

"How are you a-goin' to save a gal as runs away from yer, an' won't listen to nothing, especially when she's backed up by a howlin' coyote uv a woman?"

"What woman do you mean?"

"What woman! Why, thet mischief-makin' animal ez allers gives me trouble—my sister Susie."

The fellow seemed to be worked up into a boiling rage at the mere thought of his sister.

"Durn her pacter, I'll—I'll—kill her if she ever comes near me ag'in!"

"What will you do? You'll kill her, will you?" suddenly exclaimed an indignant voice right in his ear.

At the same time he found himself in the powerful grasp of the lady who was known as Susie Vorce, and who was hardly inferior to her hopeful brother in physical strength.

She seized him by the shoulders and shook him as if he were a rat, until his teeth chattered in his head.

"You'll kill me, will you? Why, you white-livered hound, I believe I should only be doing my duty to the rest of mankind if I was to throw you over that bluff. Where is Belle Ormsby?"

She flung this last question at him with the voice of a stentor, at the same time giving him another shake that made him look absolutely ridiculous.

This desperate man, who seemed hardly to know the meaning of fear in a contest with men, was cowed completely by his sister.

As for Old Secrecy, he seemed to be fast sinking into the apathetic state usual with him save when surrounded by some strong excitement.

"Where is Belle Ormsby?" repeated Susie.

"I told you that I didn't know. You should

be able ter tell somethin' 'bout her. You seen her after I did."

"You lie!"

Susie said these two words, in an easy tone, as one who was merely stating an incontrovertible fact.

"I don't lie."

"You do, and you know it. There is the girl's dress spread out on the rocks, and you know that she must be here somewhere, hidden by you."

"It doesn't foller. I didn't put the dress thar. I didn't know it wuz thar till now."

"You mean to tell me that Belle Ormsby is not hidden among these rocks, either dead or alive?"

Vorce started.

"Who sez she's dead?"

"Is she alive?"

"Let go uv my shoulders, an' I'll tell all ez I know to Old Secrecy here. It ain't much ez I do know, but what little it is doesn't concern you, anyhow."

Susie gave him a parting shake and released him.

Vorce walked along the ledge for a few yards until he came to a broad mule-path that zig-zagged down to the stage-road below. It was by means of this path, which Susie had discovered when Old Secrecy had nearly climbed to the top of the bluff so laboriously, that she had been able to put in an appearance behind her brother so opportunely.

Susie strolled to a little distance, out of hearing, and then Vorce, turning on Old Secrecy, asked:

"Well?"

"Where is Belle?" was the old man's response.

"Oh, she is all right. But, how about ther silver? Things are gittin' too warm for us here."

"Is Belle safe?" asked the old man, in a dazed sort of way. The excitement that had buoyed him up for a time seemed to have died away, and he was again the miserable, listless creature familiar to the denizens of Silver Creek.

"Don't I tell yer she's all right?"

"Thank Heaven!"

"Yes, yes, uv course. But I want ter tell yer we are goin' away, an' that if we want to git out uv dyin' with our boots on we must git out uv this section right quick."

"What have you heard?"

Old Secrecy asked the question mechanically. No one would have thought, from his manner, that he had the slightest personal interest in the peril that Newton Vorce was trying to make him comprehend.

Susie was watching the two men impatiently. "This job in ther gulch last night—" went on Vorce.

"Well?"

"Wuz er failure."

"Was it?" asked the old man unconcernedly.

"Was it?" repeated Vorce savagely. "Say, Secrecy, what's ther matter with yer?"

He shook the old man roughly as he spoke.

"Go on. I'm listening. It was a failure, you say. How was it a failure? Didn't you hold up the coach?"

"Yes. That part was all right. An' we got the chest—the Fargo chest."

"Yes?"

"But it was fixed."

"Sure?"

"Yes; sure. Thar wuz nothing in it but a lot of stones, chunks of iron an' sand. Showin' ez they was up to our game."

"Well?"

"I had a tussle with ther feller ez druv—"

"Yank Storey?"

"No!" howled the other. "It wasn't Yank. It wuz thar durned tenderfoot—Dick Young, or Death-Grip, ez some uv 'em call him."

"Death-Grip?"

"Yes, sir. He wuz up in Yank's place, and when I made him git down, he pulled ther handkerchief off'n my face, and guv me ther toughest ten minutes I ever had."

Susie had carelessly drawn near to the two men and was listening. Her brother was talking too earnestly to notice her.

When he spoke about the struggle with Death-Grip, a strange light of intelligence came into her eyes.

"How did the racket end?" asked Old Secrecy slowly. His thoughts were evidently far away.

"Wal, we pulled each other around thar in ther dark fer awhile. I wuz afraid ter kill him, somehow, though I don't know why, an' at last we got parted, an' I sneaked behind a tree."

"Yes?"

"Then, uv course it wuz easy fer me to get away. I might perhaps hev rubbed him out, but I wuz er little suspicious uv two or three things. The horses ran away with the coach, an' er feller ez wuz sitting up on the driver's seat—a pal uv this byar tenderfoot, uv course he got away, coach and all. I'm expecting a posse down here any moment, an' I didn't want 'em to be sayin' ez I hed murdered ther driver of the coach. But mark my words, Secrecy, onless we kin git out uv these parts almighty quick, we are gone."

"And you're a nice man, ain't you, Newton

Vorce!" broke in Susie, as she stood before him with arms akimbo, and looked him up and down contemptuously.

"You wuz listening?" growled her brother.

"I was listening."

"What fur?"

"Don't matter to you. But I'm going to block your game, whatever it may be."

"You cat!" hissed Vorce.

Susie's lip curled.

"Where is Belle Ormsby?" she demanded, looking straight into the eyes of her brother.

"You heard me tell Old Secrecy that I didn't know—didn't yer?"

"I heard you say it, and I knew that you lied."

"You know whar she went when she came out uv ther dug-out. You know that she fell—"

Susie hastily clapped her hand over his mouth.

"Haven't you any sense?" she whispered, as she nodded meaningly toward Old Secrecy, who was standing at a little distance looking vacantly at the red-streaked eastern sky over the sharp ridges of the Rockies.

"Wal, he's got ter know it sooner or later," was Vorce's coarse response. "Ther gal's killed, uv course."

"How comes her dress lying on the rocks over there?"

"Whar?"

Susie looked searchingly into his face.

"Do you mean to say that you do not know where Belle Ormsby's blue riding-habit is lying on the mountain, within a few hundred yards of this spot?"

"I do not."

And Susie saw that he spoke the truth.

Still Old Secrecy gazed into space, apparently oblivious of his surroundings.

"Newt, I don't believe that she was killed when she fell on the rocks."

Vorce looked up eagerly.

"Don't yer? Ef yer right 'bout that, Susie, I'll forgive yer fer all the dirt ez you hev played on me."

"Thank you for nothing. But I'll tell you this, we must find Belle Ormsby, if she is alive, or her body, if—she is dead."

"Find her! Wal, now, you bet ef thar is any chance uv that thar gal being alive, I'll find her. Come, Secrecy, let us look along the rocks, hyar, au' see ef we kin find Belle."

The words seemed to electrify the old man. He dropped his listless manner as if it were a garment, and became on the instant keen, alert, ready for action.

"What shall we do first?" he asked, looking at Susie, who took the lead by sheer force of character.

"Go to the place where we saw the dress and search thoroughly for some small gorge or cave into which she may have gone. You see, Newt, this place is right below the dug-out, and she may have fallen on some of those pines and scrambled down to the place where we saw her dress."

"Yes, that's so."

The three walked cautiously along the narrow ledge until they reached the place where the mule-path, up which Susie had come, ran down into the pine thicket, hundreds of feet below.

"Here, you, sir! Stop! Where are you going? Have you any connection with this monkey? If you have, take him in charge. My name is Quick—Silas Quick, of the firm of Quick and Slamm, attorneys-at-law, Chicago, Illinois."

Vorce and his sister looked at the speaker, and saw that he was firmly bound with a lariat, and that a rope had been passed around his feet under the body of his broncho, so that he could not possibly get out of his saddle without assistance.

Behind him rode Jake Drum, with a cigar in his mouth, a pistol in his right hand and Silas Quick's flask in his left. Around his neck he wore, in addition to his usual red ribbon, the lawyer's yellow silk handkerchief. This combination of colors, surrounded by his flaming red hair, which was staring in all directions, gave him a positively appalling appearance.

He was evidently very much satisfied with himself, for he was smiling from ear to ear.

When the lawyer commenced his oration to Vorce and the others Jake rode up to his prisoner and gave him a good sharp tap on his shoulder with the pistol.

"Silence!"

"Why, you miserable freak, what do you mean? Don't you know that you have one foot on the gallows already, and that when once I get back to Chicago you will get the other there, preparatory to dropping in a heap through the hole in the middle?"

Old Secrecy had gone several yards in advance of Vorce and his sister, in his eagerness to follow the trail of Belle, and had not been seen by Quick or Jake Drum.

"Bring him up, Jake. We'll hev ter keep him quiet fer a time, I s'pose," said Vorce, without taking the least notice of the lawyer's vigorous denunciations.

"What is that, Jake? Did you say?" suddenly asked Old Secrecy, as he walked back rapidly.

"Mr. Ormsby!" cried Jake.

"Ormsby!" howled the lawyer. "Grant Ormsby? Where is he?" Then, as he saw Old Secrecy, coming toward him, he howled, as he struggled like a madman to break or loosen the rope that held him: "You red-headed villain, it will be worth five thousand dollars to you if you will take this rope off, so that I can get back to Chicago within a week."

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD FRIENDS TO THE RESCUE.

NEVER did the young detective move with more headlong eagerness than when he heard the voice of the girl he had learned to love calling to him in tones of supplication.

"Death-Grip! Death-Grip!" repeated Belle Ormsby's voice as he dragged himself up by the rough ridges of rock and the occasional tufts of scrubby grass that marked the hillside.

The faintest streak of light in the eastern horizon showed him that the morning was far advanced, and that dawn was close at hand. But he could not afford to wait it. Belle was in danger—perhaps in the hands of Vorce, and she should never cry for assistance from Dick Young in vain.

He found the ascent comparatively easy—perhaps because he was so anxious to get up that he did not notice the difficulties. At all events, he soon found himself high up on the mountain-side, with the thicket of pines, standing gaunt and still in the breathless morn, hundreds of feet below him.

He stood still on a little ledge that gave him a good foothold and peered around him.

The streak of light in the east had been getting broader and longer, and he could see in an uncertain way, everything in his immediate vicinity.

Where was Belle?

Since she had repeated her call to him, he had not heard her voice.

Was she in the power of an enemy, who had stopped her mouth, because he knew that Death-Grip was within hearing? The detective ground his teeth as he thought of this possibility.

"Belle!" he cried. "Belle!"

No answer.

He looked up and saw that an overhanging ledge some twenty-feet above him ran out within a short distance of another and similar ledge protruding from the opposite side of the canyon.

"Death-Grip!"

Again Belle's voice.

"Yes, yes. I am coming!" he answered, eagerly. "Where are you?"

"Here."

The voice came from the ledge above.

"Are you hurt?" asked the detective.

"No, but Vorce is somewhere near me, and I am afraid he may return at any moment."

"Let him, and it will be the worse for him. I have a score to settle with him, and the day of reckoning is not far off. How can I get up to you, I wonder?"

"Turn to your right. Walk along a little way, and you will find the stump of a pine. Grasp it, and let yourself swing out. Then you can pull yourself up to the ledge. Vorce got up that way, but it is impossible to go down by it."

Even while the girl was speaking, Death-Grip had worked himself along and up to the stump, found it, and dragged himself to the ledge.

"Death-Grip!" The girl came forward and placed her two hands trustingly in that of the young detective.

He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. Over her shoulders she wore a shawl, upon which streamed masses of golden hair. She looked tired and worried, but in spite of all she had passed through her eyes retained their wonted brightness, and she smiled cheerfully as the young man returned the pressure of her hands with an earnestness that she thoroughly understood.

"When I fell over the cliff—" she commenced.

"Fell over the cliff?"

"Yes. Did you not know? I slipped and dropped over the precipice in front of Newton Vorce's dug-out. I thought I was killed, but I happened, by the merest chance, to alight on a small ledge of rock only a few feet below, from which I managed to crawl down here. Then Vorce found me."

"Well?"

"He was here a few minutes ago. He has gone away, but I expect him back directly. From what he said I knew that you were just below, and I called to you."

As Belle told her simple story, the detective clinched his fists and breathed bitter denunciations of the man he was now, more than ever, determined to capture.

"Where is your dress?" he asked, as he saw that below the shawl appeared only a white skirt instead of the blue riding-habit.

"It is here. It was wet, and I spread it on the rocks to dry. It is damp now, but I can wear it."

She took up the dress as she spoke, and stepping behind one of the many jagged projections in the mountain, quickly threw it on, and came out looking her usual self again.

"We must get you away from here quickly," suggested Death-Grip. "Then I can come back and attend to Mr. Vorce."

"He will return directly, I know."

"Then all the more reason for prompt action. It is impossible to get down the way I came up, and if we walk along here we shall probably meet Vorce."

Death-Grip spoke slowly, as if thinking up a plan. Suddenly he clapped his hands and ejaculated:

"I have it. What do you think of this?"

He pointed to a long plank which had caught his eye, leaning against the wall of rock in a perpendicular position. It had probably dropped from the mule-path above at some time or other, and been caught in the place that Death-Grip discovered it.

Belle watched him curiously as he moved the plank along, keeping it on end the while, to the place where the ledge reached furthest out toward that on the other side of the canyon.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Make a bridge. It is our only chance to get you away. Once on the other side of the gorge, you can get down the mountain and go home by way of the road. We shall have to walk some distance, I am afraid, until we meet somebody with a horse."

"I don't care for that, as long as I can get away from Vorce," said the girl, and the detective saw that she meant it.

Death-Grip, having got the plank in the proper position, let it fall over the gap, with the other end resting on the opposite bank. Beneath was a yawning space two hundred feet deep.

It was quite light now, and the girl saw that when the plank—an ordinary two-inch board, thirteen inches wide—was laid over the gorge, it extended not more than two feet over the bank on each side. The opening was about twenty feet, so that the board was twenty-four feet long.

Death-Grip looked around him, and then went cautiously on the plank to test its strength.

As he walked forward over the giddy chasm, the board, slipping from the rain of the night before, bent under his weight in a dangerous manner, dragging away from the bank on each side, until not more than a foot rested on the banks at either end.

He reached the middle and stood for a minute. Then, satisfied that it would bear the lighter weight of the girl, he prepared to retrace his steps, when a shriek from Belle startled him.

"Vorce is coming!"

Without hesitation she rushed toward the plank, and before Death-Grip could utter a word of warning, she was upon it.

The detective ran off to the other side, nearly reaching it when Belle got to the middle.

Her rapid movements and the jarring to the board caused by Death-Grip's hurried retreat, had shifted the board, and the detective saw with horror that it was pulling away from the ledge which he and his companion had just left.

He ran off, and stood ready to give his hand to the girl as soon as she came within his reach.

"Step lightly and quickly, for Heaven's sake!" he cried, as he saw the board bending and pulling further away from the bank.

The girl, realizing her danger, but more anxious to get away from Vorce's hated presence than to avoid the risk of falling into the gulch, tripped over the tottering bridge toward the haven of safety where Death-Grip stood with outstretched hand.

The board sagged more and more, and the young detective suffered agonies of suspense, as he saw what a slight hold the board had on the opposite bank.

Three more steps! Two! One!

He seized Belle by the hand, and drew her to safety, just as the plank, slipping from the opposite bank, went whirling into space, and was smashed into splinters on the sharp points of the rocks, two hundred feet below.

A huge rock, which lay at the edge of the precipice, afforded shelter to Death-Grip and the girl, and behind it he drew her, just as Newt Vorce appeared on the spot they had so lately left, and peered across the chasm.

"Just in time," whispered Death-Grip, as he managed to get a view of the desperado without showing himself. "We have checkmated the gentleman this time."

Vorce stood looking at the boulder behind which they had retreated, with a baleful light in his eyes. In his hand he held his Winchester rifle, with his finger on the trigger, and an unmistakable determination to fire at the first sign of the detective.

"Sorry to be obliged to disappoint that amiable gentleman, but I am afraid that we really must leave him for the present," observed Death-Grip, as he noted the belligerent attitude of the other.

He took Belle's hand as he spoke, and led her down the path, the huge boulder effectually screening them from the sight of the desperado.

"If I could only get Daisy I should not care for anything," said the girl.

"Where is she?"

"In Vorce's dug-out."

"I will get her for you if you will direct me to the place."

"Will you?"

There was such a delighted ring in the young girl's voice at the thought of securing her pet, that Death-Grip felt that he would go through anything to give her back the horse she loved so well.

"Where is the dug-out?" he asked.

The girl's countenance fell.

"Oh, it is impossible for you to go up there. You never could find it, and I would not let you go through the difficulties and dangers by yourself."

"Nonsense! Tell me where it is."

With a little more persuasion, she gave him as explicit directions as she could, and made him understand just how he must proceed to get the horse out, and bring her down the mountain.

They were walking swiftly down a narrow path while speaking, and soon stood in the thicket of pines at the bottom of Lone Pine Gulch, from which they could look up and see, outlined against the clear, blue sky, the two overhanging ledges of rock between which they had made their perilous trip on their improvised bridge.

"Now, you stay here, hidden snugly among the trees, while I go up the mountain by the short cut to the dug-out. I shall have to come back by the road with the horse, of course, but I will not be longer than I can help. When once I see you safely on your road home, I shall have time to attend to Mr. Vorce."

He turned to climb the mountain, but stopped with an exclamation:

"Bob! Jack!"

"That's what! Whar did you kim from?" said the voice of Bob Brace, as that hero, accompanied by Jack Noble, stepped out of the thicket and stood before them.

Mutual explanations followed. Bob told of his hunt for the road-agents, in company with Lawyer Quick, and how they had missed the latter while they were hunting for the treasure-box of Wells, Fargo & Co.

"We thought ez Vorce had either rubbed you out or corraled you in his ranch," added Bob, "but hyar you turn up ez bright ez a gold eagle, an' Old Secrecy's gal with yer. You're a dandy, Dick."

Jack Noble did not say anything, but he nodded his head in acquiescence with Bob Brace's sentiments.

"Now, boys," observed Death-Grip, "I want a horse for Miss Belle. I was just going up the mountain to get her own mare, Daisy, but perhaps you can help us out."

Without a word, Brace stepped back into the thicket, and almost immediately returned with the mustang upon which he had ridden with Lawyer Quick from the hotel with the apathetic landlord.

"Thar, that's at Miss Belle's sarvice, I'm sure," with a rough bow to the girl.

Belle sprang lightly into the saddle and secured a firm seat in spite of the fact that the horse was not accustomed for a lady.

"Are yer heeled, Miss Belle?" asked Bob.

"No; I must have lost my pistol when I fell over the bluff."

"Ah! That's bad. Wal, hyar's a six-shooter and hyar's some extra cartridges. You'll know what ter do with 'em in case yer meets with trouble, won't yer?"

The girl took the weapon, and as she balanced it in her hand, said, emphatically: "I am going up to the dug-out to get Daisy. If Vorce interferes with me, I will show him what I know about pistols."

"Good! thar's cl'ar grit in that gal!" ejaculated Brace, as Belle gave her mustang a cut with her whip and galloped away.

CHAPTER XX.

DEMON SERVES HIS MASTER.

"TAKE that thar feller up to ther dug-out, Jake," commanded Vorce, impatiently as the lawyer expressed his desire to get to Chicago before the end of the week. "He's—"

"You rascal!" interrupted Silas Quick. "I'll have you in the Penitentiary before you are many weeks older. Make this monkey of yours let me go, or I'll blow your brains out."

Vorce laughed contemptuously, while Jake Drum shivered with indignation.

Perhaps the lariat tightened a little around the lawyer's elbows as punishment for his uncomplimentary reference to Jake, but the latter did not say anything.

"Your name is Grant Ormsby, I understand," continued Silas, addressing Old Secrecy.

"Yes."

"How long have you been in Colorado?"

"How long?" repeated the old man, vacantly.

"Yes—how long? Don't beat about the bush. Answer my question. I made it plain enough. Remember that you are on your oath—No, you're not, either. I forgot—"

"Wal, I should say you did forgot," put in Vorce. "Jake, take this chattering magpie away, or durn me ef I won't hev ter kick him. He makes me tired."

"Silence!" thundered the lawyer. "Grant

Ormsby, I should like to have a little private conversation with you."

"With me?"

Old Secrecy turned pale, and Vorce frowned savagely.

"Yes, sir, with you. But I cannot attend to any business while I am tied up in this ridiculous fashion, like a trussed turkey."

"Take him along, Jake."

The little man tugged at the lariat, and led the lawyer away, expostulating and threatening until he was out of hearing.

"I wonder what he wanted with me?" observed Old Secrecy, looking dreamily after the departing pair.

"Never mind about him, Secrecy. We hev business, an' it's business ez must be attended to right away, too."

"Well."

"I've just left that meddling tenderfoot, Dick Young. I hed ter git away from him, 'cause it wasn't safe just then to rub him out, but I will do it."

"Where is he?"

"That's more than I kin tell at this minute. Wait while I take a look around."

Vorce disappeared as he spoke, leaving Old Secrecy sitting on a boulder in his usual dreamy state. In a few minutes the desperado returned, very pale and evidently full of superstitious terror.

"I've seen her!" he whispered, huskily.

"Who?"

"Belle! I saw her an' I spoke to her. At least, it looked like her. But I believe it wuz her ghost."

"You saw Belle?" asked the old man, as he grasped Vorce by the shoulders and gazed eagerly into his face. "Where is she? Where is my Belle?"

"She's around them rocks over thar on ther mountain ef it is her. But I tell yer no mortal woman could hev tumbled over that thar bluff an' be alive after it. It's er ghost—thet's what it is."

But Old Secrecy did not hear the last observation. He had bounded away with the youthful vigor that comes to him spasmodically under the influence of strong excitement, and was searching wildly for his daughter.

"What er comical old rooster he is," muttered Vorce. "Sometimes I think he ain't half as old an' worn out ez he purtends ter be."

He followed Old Secrecy around the jutting rock and arrived at the place where Death-Grip had thrown the plank across the chasm just in time to see the young detective disappear behind the boulder.

"Curse him! If I could only ha' drawn a bead on him I'd ha' settled ther chase this time."

"See, Vorce, there she goes. There is Belle!" cried Old Secrecy, as he caught sight of the girl through the trees so far below.

"Yes, and with that skunk, too!"

Vorce could hardly contain himself with rage, as he threw his rifle to his shoulder and tried to take aim at the detective. Hesaw that it would be impossible to obtain a shot at him, however, and dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, with an oath, he stood scowling at his companion like a baffled fiend.

Old Secrecy was looking about to see how he could get down to the road below. With the instinct of a man experienced in Western landmarks, he saw at once that the only way was by reaching the other side of the gorge and following the path taken by Death-Grip and Belle.

"Whar's Susie?" exclaimed Vorce. "I ain't seen her sence Jake an' that thar lawyer came up the road. I never saw such a gal ez she is—allus a-dodgin' around an' botherin' me. She ain't got no nateral affection, I don't think."

"How can we get across this gap?" asked Old Secrecy, ignoring the other's last observation.

"Can't get across it," said Vorce, sententiously. "What d'ye want ter cross it fer, anyhow?"

"To go to Belle."

"What fer? You've seen ez Belle is all right (though how she comes ter be alive I can't make out), an' what's ther use uv chasin' her about ther country? You know she'll go home, an' you can find her thar when you want her. We had better look after our other business now. Ther whole scheme has been give away by some one, an' we'll hev ter move our headquarters from this section mighty sudden."

"I shall be glad to get away from it, and I swear I'll never make another flash coin as long as I live," said Old Secrecy, fervently.

"Don't do any rash sw'arin', Secrecy. Yer don't allers know jist what yer may hev ter do in futur', an' you know our bargain. I've got ter hev Belle, an' you're ter help me raise er certain sum of money. When you've done thet, then I give up ther paper that'll hang yer ef it ever gits into anybody's hands away from me. Isn't that so, Secrecy?"

"Yes."

"It wuz er rather silly thing ter do, Secrecy, but yer did it. In ther first place, yer made er chump uv yerself to go an' write er confession uv er murder ez no one would ever hev found out; an' then yer did wuss by lettin' ther confes-

sion git into my hands. Uv course, you thought ez you wuz er goin' ter die, but yer ought ter hev thought that it wuz not onpossible ez yer might git well. See?"

Vorce grinned unpleasantly as he delivered himself of this harangue, but Old Secrecy shook his head sadly.

"Now," continued the desperado, "we'll go up to the dug-out, gather everytting that we want, an' make tracks fer ther East. I think ez Chicago is the safest place fer us jist at present."

"Yes."

Old Secrecy seemed too thoroughly beaten down to care about arguing any point with his companion.

"I hev er string uv horses ez I'd like ter dispose of. But I don't think it 'u'd be safe ter do much with 'em this side uv Denver, unless I might throw off one occasionally on ther road."

"I have nothing to do with your horse business," the old man roused himself up to say.

"No, Secrecy, you haven't, but I'm afraid, if they grabbed Newton Vorce for any little thing connected with horses, that Old Secrecy would take er swing from er tree in ther same neighborhood."

"Perhaps you are right. I seem to be bound to you for evil in every way," sighed the old man.

Vorce did not reply, but throwing his Winchester over his shoulder, retraced his steps to the spot whence the lawyer and Jake Drum had started for the dug-out.

He looked around to see that Old Secrecy was following, and made his way as rapidly as possible, to the thicket of pines in the gulch.

Old Secrecy turned aside to the place where he had left his horse, and having secured it, galloped after Vorce toward the pine thicket.

Demon was standing quietly among the pines, utterly undisturbed by the movements of the different persons in his vicinity, all of them, as it happened, having failed to strike the exact spot on which the splendidly-trained animal stood.

"Now, Secrecy," whispered Vorce, "we shall hev ter ride like ther deuce, 'cause we don't know how soon some uv them thar fellers will be cn us. I'm sorry this hyar coach job turned out bad. We need a little more ready cash, an' I thought that would hev helped us."

"Yes."

Old Secrecy seemed to be utterly spiritless, and could only yield a simple assent to every proposition of his partner.

"Wal, we'll go to ther ranch in Silver Creek first, and lay low all day thar. It'll take a mighty smart lot uv officers ter git us out uv thar when once we git in."

"Yes."

"An' then at nightfall we kin come out with ther horses and visit ther dug-out."

"Yes."

"I thought at first we would go to ther dug-out right away, but ther other plan is best."

"Yes."

"Very well, then. Let's git."

"Hold on. Hands up!"

Short and sharp came the order from the thicket in tones that Old Secrecy and Newt Vorce both recognized at once as those of Bob Brace.

No one was to be seen, but that fact was anything but reassuring, for behind the trees in the gloomy thicket might be a dozen pistols ready to send bullets to their hearts.

"Hands up thar!" came the order again.

Vorce and the old man did not obey instantly, and two shots whistled close to their heads.

Up went up their four hands, as if some one had pulled a string.

"That's right," said Bob Brace, approvingly, as he stepped from behind a huge pine and was followed by Jack Noble.

"What d'ye mean by this hyar game?" growled Vorce, still with his hands up.

"We mean business. You kin bet yer life on thet."

"Wal, explain yerself."

"It's jist hyar, Newt Vorce. We hev enough ag'in' yer to make yer jump on the atmosphere, and we propose to take yer back to Silver Creek, whar you will be disposed uv accordin' to law."

"Big talk!" sneered Vorce.

"We're big men in this hyar enterprise, ez you'll find out afore we're through with yer. It's taken some time to run yer down, but we've got yer whar we want you now, an' don't you forgit it."

"I ain't ther man ter forgit anything, an' I'll remember this hyar bluff uv yours, Bob Brace, when it's cl'ar gone from your memory," was the significant reply of the desperado.

Brace did not answer. He and Noble walked cautiously forward, the former keeping Vorce covered with his revolver, and Noble taking similar care of Old Secrecy.

The old man had not questioned the proceedings of his captors. He had raised his hands when commanded to do so, and now seemed quite content to let events take their course.

"Vorce, ef I see you make er motion to touch thet thar gun uv yours ag'in, I'll let daylight through yer skull," exclaimed Brace, as he

walked forward, with a wary eye on the desperado.

Vorce sat on his horse, Demon, motionless as a statue, apparently, but Bob had detected the faintest quiver of his right hand, which to a man accustomed to weapons betokened an intention to try a desperate game—that is, to fire a shot at an enemy who had the drop on him.

Jack Noble took Old Secrecy's pistol and knife from him and led his horse toward the thicket.

"I'm kinder sorry for you, Secrecy," said the young man, "but ef you run with er man like Newt Vorce, you must expect to get hauled up some time or other."

"Yes, I suppose so, but it doesn't matter," answered the old man, listlessly. "I've about done my time in the world, anyhow. If Belle was all right, I should be glad to leave it."

Bob Brace, with his pistol pointed at Vorce's head, seized the butt of the desperado's Winchester, dragged it from his shoulder, and threw it to the ground.

Vorce sat in his saddle scowling.

Suddenly his horse reared up, and half-wheeled around to the left, striking Bob Brace on the shoulder with one of his forefeet as he did so. It happened that the blow was little more than a touch, but it was sufficient to send Bob reeling to the ground, his revolver going off harmlessly as he fell.

With a defiant shout, Vorce drew his six-shooter from his belt, and putting spurs to Demon, dashed down the road toward the village of Silver Creek.

CHAPTER XXI.

JAKE'S NECKTIE IS DISARRANGED.

It was well for Newton Vorce that his horse was fleet of foot.

Even as the well-trained beast struck his long stride, three pistol-shots rung out, the bullets singing close to his rider's head.

Obeysing the slightest pressure of Vorce's knees, Demon swerved quickly from side to side, thus reducing very materially the chances of the shooter's hitting the fugitive.

He glanced behind him, and the frown on his brow became deeper, as he turned in his saddle, took deliberate aim at the foremost of his pursuers, and fired.

The swerving of Demon, that had saved his rider from receiving the bullets aimed at him, now did as much for the man at whom Newt Vorce fired.

The aim of the desperado had been true enough, but the horse's erratic movements caused the bullet to go through the other man's hat, instead of his head, as the desperado had intended it should.

Quick as a flash the shot was returned, but Vorce seemed to bear a charmed life, for he had not been hit at all yet.

"Curse you, Dick Young, I wonder where you came from?" he muttered, as he glanced over his shoulder at the man he had deliberately tried to kill.

And Death-Grip was saying, as he watched the rapidly retreating figure of the man he was hunting down: "If I only had my horse, Raker, under me, Mr. Vorce, I would try a race with you, and overhaul you before you got a mile down the gulch, just for the honor of old Yale."

"That feller's slick, Dick," observed Bob Brace, as he walked slowly toward Death-Grip, reloading his revolver as he did so. "He's got away sure."

"Only for the time, Bob. If it were not that I want to take him alive, I could have laid him out easily enough from the wood."

"I almost wish you had."

"Never mind, Bob, we will run him down yet."

"I hope so. He's hed too many uv my horses already, an' I don't want ter give him a chance ter git his hooks inter any more."

"He shall not. Rest assured of that."

"Now, what are we ter do? I think ther best thing will be ter try an' find ther lawyer," suggested Bob Brace to Jack Noble.

"Where is he?" asked Death-Grip.

Bob Brace told the detective Silas Quick had been one of the party to follow the road-agents, and how he had disappeared, apparently in the custody of Jake Drum.

"Why didn't you help him out?" asked the detective.

"We wuz at the other end uv ther wood an' didn't know anything about it till it wuz too late. We wuz poking about after ther thar box of Wells & Fargo, an' ther fust thing we know'd ther lawyer wuz a-bein' yanked away up ther hill too far fur us to do anything about it right away. Howsumever, we're pretty sure he's been taken up to ther ranch on the mountains whar Vorce bides himself sometimes, an' we ain't any doubt that we kin git ther lawyer out all right when we conclude to try."

"We only have one horse between the three of us," observed Death-Grip.

"Yes, thet's so. But then, it don't make very much difference, 'cause ef we want ter git ther thet ranch ther quickest way, we'll hev ter

climb up ther mountains, an' horses wouldn't be so very much use. 'Sides, we kin git horses up thar, or I'll be mistaken."

"Let us start," said Death-Grip, briefly.

The three men walked along the road for a short distance, where the dust from the heels of Vorce's horse had hardly settled, though the desperado was already out of sight. Then they stopped, as Brace pointed silently to a place on the side of the hill where it looked a little less inaccessible than the rest of it.

Death-Grip led the way up the ascent by making a running leap that enabled him to reach a ledge by which he pulled himself up. The stones and dirt came rattling down, but his two companions, disregarding them, followed swiftly, and soon clung by his side.

Foot by foot the three men made their way up the precipitous mountain. Sometimes they slipped and dropped thirty, forty or fifty feet, but there was always some friendly stump, ledge or inequality to save them from going too far, and the only notice they took of these mishaps was to grumble a little, and redouble their efforts to reach their goal.

Two hours after they left the wagon-road below they lay, panting with their exertions, on the narrow mule-path that led directly past Newt Vorce's dug-out.

"Pretty tough climb, eh, Dick?" gasped Bob Brace.

"Yes, a good healthy breather," acquiesced Death-Grip, carelessly.

"Breather!" repeated Jack Noble. "I feel as if I would never breathe quietly again. You're ther coolest rooster I ever see, for an Eastern man."

"Oh, there are cool men in the East, Jack, though you do not appear to think so. I don't know where the West would be were it not for the pluck, coolness and enterprise of men from the Atlantic States."

The threatened discussion as to the relative merits of the East and West was here cut short.

The patter-patter of horses' hoofs on the hard mountain mule path could be heard in the distance, and the three men began to look for an ambush.

"Oh, say, Dick," suddenly exclaimed Bob Brace. "Did you leave Old Secrecy all safe? I just trusted to you to look out fur him. All I did was to tie his hands behind him, fasten him to his horse, an' hitch ther horse to a tree in ther thicket."

"Well, he's there yet, I guess," answered Death-Grip. "We couldn't bring him here with us, and there is not much danger of his getting away."

The fact was that Bob Brace had forgotten all about his prisoner, and he felt a little ashamed of himself, but Death-Grip's manner thoroughly reassured him.

"Hyar's ther place we want," said Jack Noble, as he pointed to a jutting rock that reduced the width of the path to a space barely sufficient for a horse to walk on. "We can all hide behind this, and when that red-headed little duck comes erlong, we kin do anything we want ter with him."

"Are we sure that it is he coming? This path is used by other people besides Jake Drum," suggested Death-Grip.

"Thet's so, but we won't do no harm by waiting. Come, boys, quick. Hyar they are!"

As Bob Brace spoke he jumped behind the rock and was joined by his two companions just as Jake Drum and Lawyer Quick appeared around a bend on the road nearly a quarter of a mile lower down.

The rope was still around Mr. Quick's elbows as he sat bolt upright on his horse, and Jake held the end of the rope, occasionally giving it a jerk for fun.

There was an expression of deep, unutterable disgust on the face of the lawyer, and it would have been an unpleasant thing for Mr. Drum if the rope had suddenly slipped off his prisoner at that moment.

"How much further are we to ride like this?" the lawyer grumbled.

Jake Drum's only answer was to give the lariat a twitch that nearly dragged the lawyer from his saddle, and made his mustang swerve in a dangerous fashion.

"I'll get you in court in Chicago some day, and if I don't make you wish you had died when you were very young, then my name is not Silas Quick," muttered the lawyer, under his breath.

Jake Drum coolly arranged his toilet as he rode on, straightening his red ribbon necktie, combing his thick red hair with his fingers and straightening his boy's shirt-waist as well as he could. The events of the night had left him in a rather dilapidated condition, and he was painfully conscious of the fact.

Slowly the two jogged along toward the jutting rock behind which the detective and his two allies were waiting for them.

"Now, lawyer, here's a rather dangerous place. If you don't ride very carefully you are liable to go tumbling over, and all your troubles will be ended at once."

Jake nodded his head toward the narrow path outside the rock as he spoke, and the lawyer saw the force of the warning.

"Well, I should like to be informed, if the question is allowed by this court to be relevant, how I am to take precautionary measures with my arms fastened to my sides."

"That is your business."

"My business? Well, confound your impudence, you—"

He was about to relieve himself of several ob-jurgatory epithets, but experience had already taught him that it did not pay to wound Jake Drum's vanity.

The dwarf grinned maliciously. He saw what was passing in the lawyer's mind, and he enjoyed it.

"I will let you go first," he said, "because I do not care to trust you behind me at such a place as that. But you will notice that I have two pistols—"

"One of 'em was mine," growled the lawyer.

"Yes, it was; but it is mine now."

"I'll have it again, though, or my name is not Silas Quick, of Quick & Slamm, Chicago," muttered Silas, under his breath.

"What did you say?"

Jake Drum's ears, besides being very large, were also preternaturally sharp.

"Nothing of any consequence."

"Well, I was going to say that I would give you a chance, but if you try any monkey business with me, you will never get back to Chicago, either this week or any other time."

"Go on."

"I am going to take the rope off your arms."

"Ah!"

Silas uttered this word with such a delighted intonation that Jake Drum felt called upon to say something to moderate his transports.

"Mind you, that won't be giving you your liberty, by any means, because I shall have the drop on you with these two sixes, and I'll pull the trigger at the least sign of bad behavior."

"Pull and be—hanged!"

Jake Drum was enjoying himself very much. He had no particular ill-will toward the lawyer except on account of the latter's contemptuous references to his (Jake's) personal appearance, but he liked the sensation of having a smart Chicago lawyer entirely in his power. Moreover, he knew that the job in which he had assisted Vorce the night before had put his head into a noose that might be tightened at any moment did he allow the lawyer to get a chance to communicate with the authorities.

For these reasons it was safe to trust Jake Drum to take every care of his prisoner.

He examined both his pistols carefully, saw that every chamber was full, that the locks worked easily, and that the cartridges were in good condition. Then he dropped behind his prisoner, still holding the lariat.

They were now only a few yards from the jutting rock, which at a little distance appeared to block the path entirely, so little space did it leave for travel.

"Now, lawyer, you see that I have the drop on you, don't you?" asked Jake once more, as he began to finger the knots around his prisoner's arms.

"Oh, yes, I see. I shall be glad when you get these cords off. They have cut into my arms so deeply that I should be helpless even if I wanted to try conclusions with you," answered Mr. Quick testily.

A few tugs at the knots, and the rope fell off the lawyer's arms, though still lying around him on the horse's back.

Jake had used his left hand to untie the rope, holding the pistol from that hand under his arm, while he kept the pistol in his right hand pointed at his prisoner's head.

"Git along, lawyer."

Silas Quick stretched his arms to try and circulate the blood a little. Then he hit his horse with his open hand and made him canter toward the narrow path outside the rock.

Jake Drum still held the end of the rope, and the sudden movement of the lawyer dragged him forward in a rather unceremonious fashion.

"Not so fast, unless you want to go over!" he squeaked.

Silas's only answer was to urge his horse forward and put him straight at the narrow path.

The sure-footed little animal went along without hesitation, and soon had his rider in safety on the other side of the rock, with Jake Drum clinging to the end of the rope.

"Here, quit that!" he yelled, as he noticed a suspicious start on the part of Quick.

The fact was, that the lawyer had just become cognizant of the presence of Death-Grip and his companions. They had made him a sign to keep quiet, and, with the astuteness of a lawyer accustomed to self-control, he had repressed all signs of astonishment as soon as they were provoked.

Quick turned his horse around as soon as he had gained the wide path on the other side of the rock, and sat facing Drum.

Jake rode cautiously past the rock, holding his two revolvers poised, ready to blow out the brains of the lawyer if necessary.

He rode straight ahead, and with his eyes fixed on Quick, and did not notice the crouching forms of the three men lying in wait for him.

"There, lawyer. Now, we will ride on for

another half-mile, and I guess we shall be there," said Jake complacently.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when two strong hands seized each of his arms, and he was dragged backward at full length on his horse.

The sudden jerk caused both his pistols to be discharged, the bullets whistling rather close to the lawyer's head, and causing that gentleman to dodge with marvelous celerity.

"Hold on thar, Jake. We're a-goin' up to thar dug-out, and we should like to hev your company," cried Bob Brace, cheerily, as he grabbed the dwarf's red hair with his left hand, while snatching away his prisoner's pistol with his right.

"You're in a bad business, I'm afraid, Jake," whispered Death-Grip on the left side, as he seized the dwarf's pistol.

"Gentlemen, you are mussing my necktie," was all that Jake answered, his usual *sang froid* coming to his aid as soon as he saw the tables were turned against him.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWT VORCE RUN TO EARTH.

BELLE ORMSBY dashed along the road with her teeth clinched and a determination to offer defiance to Newt Vorce if she should meet him, in her heart.

"I want Daisy, and then I want my father. I do not know what hold Vorce has on him, but, whatever it is, I am determined to break it. I am going to get him away from this hateful place. He has money, I know, and I am sure that in a city like Chicago we should be able to live in peace and respectability. My poor father!"

The girl sighed, and then with a toss of her golden curls, she gave the mustang a sharp cut with her whip and sent him bounding along faster than ever.

The rapid motion naturally had an exhilarating effect upon her, and soon she felt strong enough to cope with and overcome a dozen Newton Vorses, in behalf of her father and her own independence.

She got to the end of Lone Pine Gulch and struck the open prairie.

"Belle—Belle Ormsby!"

A woman's voice.

"Why, Susie! Where did you come from?"

"Where did you come from, I should say," was Susie's response, as leaping from the horse she rode, she came up to Belle and nearly pulled her from the saddle in a hearty embrace.

The young girl returned the hug quite as heartily. She was unfeignedly pleased to see the good-natured hostess of Silver Creek Tavern.

"How did you manage to scramble down the side of that cliff without getting hurt, Belle?"

Belle told the story of her escape over again, and Susie hugged her three or four times in succession.

"And now, where are you going, dear?" asked Susie. "I suppose you know that your father is in danger—that the officers are after him and Newton, and Jake. I have no pity for Newton, though he is my brother. He is at the bottom of all the deviltry your father has got into, and as for Jake, he is a soft fool, who will do anything he is told."

"I was going to the dug-out to get my horse. Then I meant to go home, and get father away."

"My child, your father isn't at home. He is somewhere in the mountains looking for you. The last I saw of him, he was with that precious brother of mine. I left him there, because I thought I could find you better without his assistance."

"What shall I do?"

"Well, dear, if you will take my advice, you will go quietly home with me and get a few hours' sleep. You need them, I am sure."

In truth Belle was tired. She had been up a great many hours, and had passed through scenes of excitement that she never could have borne save under the influence of a nervous state that kept her keyed up to an unnatural pitch. Now, that the strain was a little relaxed, Nature asserted herself, and the girl felt inexpressibly wearied.

"I believe, Susie, I will follow your advice. I can get Daisy afterward."

Susie sprung out of her saddle, and the two made their way across the prairie to the village of Silver Creek.

"Come right into the hotel, Belle, and sleep here," said Susie, as they reined up in front of the veranda.

"I think I would rather go into the house. Perhaps my father may have returned," answered the girl.

She walked on to the shanty, and drawing a duplicate key from an inside pocket of her dress, threw open the door.

Everything was quiet inside. She walked through the shop, glancing with a little sigh at the corner where Daisy was accustomed to stand, noted that the forge was cold and cheerless, and then passed into the back room where stood the large chest that was the secret portal of the laboratory.

Evidently her father was not at home.

Almost without thinking of what she did, she

went to a cupboard and brought forth some bread, butter and cold meat. Then she lighted a small oil-lamp and boiled some coffee.

In fifteen minutes she had a meal ready, and sitting down to the table, she ate and drank while her thoughts were busy arranging a plan of action when she should awake from the sleep that she intended to take.

"I wonder whether it is possible that father is in the laboratory?" she thought, as, her breakfast concluded, she was putting the plates on one side. "He never let me go in there, but I believe I will do so this time. If he is angry with me at first, I am sure he will forgive me when he knows that I am so anxious about him, especially when he thought he had lost me for good."

She went into the shop and pushed the button of an electric-bell three times.

Then she stepped into the back room and waited. No response.

"Perhaps the bell didn't ring. I'll try it again."

She gave the button three more pushes, and waited.

"If he is there he does not hear the bell. That is certain. I will go to the laboratory myself."

She closed the front door, waving her hand cheerfully to Susie Vorce, who stood on the veranda of her hotel talking to a group of cowboys, and who returned the wave with a smile.

"I don't like to disobey father, but what can I do?"

Thus reflecting, the girl made everything secure, and then lighting a lamp, took down the old Directory, and searching among its leaves in the way that she had often seen her father do, took out the flat steel key that fitted the keyhole in the iron-bound chest.

In a few moments she had let herself into the underground passage, and was groping her way to the laboratory. She had never been down here before, but her father had often described it to her so accurately, that she had no difficulty in getting along.

At last she reached the movable rock that formed the door of the chamber. She felt for the secret spring, and the rock rolled back.

She stepped quickly forward, and found herself in the arms of Newton Vorce.

Her first impulse was to tear herself away as she felt in her pocket for her pistol.

"Don't be foolish, Belle. I am not going to hurt you."

Vorce spoke sternly, but the girl saw that he was not disposed to do her any injury. He was evidently preoccupied.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I am hyar on business. You kin bet on thet. Yer father an' me is pardners. Very well, then. We hev concluded to move our establishment away from Silver Creek, an' I'm hyar to sort er settle things for both of you."

"Where is my father?"

"I don't jist know now," answered Vorce, as his eyes dropped before the girl's clear gaze. "I left him up thar in ther mountains when I came down hyar. I guess he's up at ther dug-out by this time."

"Newton Vorce, if any harm has come to him, you shall suffer. I swear it," said the girl, solemnly.

"Don't I tell yer ez he's all right? I guess he would hev been home now ef it hadn't been fer that thar meddlin' sister uv mine, durn her picter. She's allers a-interferin' in things what she don't know notbin' about."

The desperado still held Belle, but she now broke from him, and began looking curiously about the chamber.

"Newton Vorce, have you been taking anything away from here that belongs to my father?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"Nothing, except that I will defend my father's property when he is absent."

"Good gall! I likes yer fer thet. But you needn't worry yerself now. I sha'n't tech anything that ain't my own."

"I don't feel so sure about that. How did you get into this room?"

"I hev er way of reaching it. Old Secrecy and I take a lesson from ther rats. We hev plenty uv ways uv getting out uv our holes in a hurry."

The grin with which Vorce said this was very unpleasant to Belle, and she shrugged her shoulders contemptuously as she resumed her examination of the apartment.

A large iron safe stood in one corner of the room, and to this she gave particular attention. Her father had the reputation of being a rich man, but she did not know any more than the veriest stranger, whether he was any more than an actual pauper.

Vorce smiled as he saw her fingering the combination lock.

"Ah! If you can git thet thar safe open, you're a durned sight smarter than I am. Thet's whar Old Secrecy keeps all ther money he's made through being my pardner, an' thar ain't er soulez knows the secret uv ther combination only himself."

"I should like to know what business he can be in as your partner."

"Dessay yer would. So would some others."

But we ain't er-givin' ourselves away this trip. Ha! What's thet? What's thet?"

He had changed his bantering tone to one of terror and desperation. His bronzed face turned a sickly yellow, and Belle saw that the hand which held his revolver was trembling with excitement.

"What's that?" he repeated, as he bent his head in a listening attitude and looked toward the heavy iron door at the other end of the laboratory.

"What do you mean?" asked Belle.

"Thet thar noise. Can't you hear it? Now! Now! It's gittin' louder—louder! It's them! They're after me! Listen! Listen!"

His voice had risen almost to a shriek as he seized Belle by the wrist and pointed with his six-shooter at the iron door.

"I don't hear anything," said the girl.

"Don't yer? Well, that's because yer know they won't hurt yer. But I hear them. Open thet thar door thet you came in by. Oh! it is open. Well, all right. We'll fool 'em. Curse 'em! I didn't think they would hev been quite so quick. Some one must hev given me away, or they wouldn't hev known ez I wuz hyar at all."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's thet thar sister uv mine. I know it. But I'll fix things with her, curse her! I'll fix things with her. Listen! Listen! Now don't you hear 'em?"

Belle listened and turned pale.

Yes, there was no mistake about it. The angry cries of many men—men on the track of a horse-thief, and that horse-thief Newton Vorce.

The sounds came from the other side of the iron door, and seemed to get nearer and nearer every moment.

"Thar's another door thet they'll hev to git through afore they kin reach this one, and I don't think they kin git at Newt Vorce fer an hour anyway," hissed the desperado.

"My poor father!" wailed Belle.

"Oh, durn yer poor father! He's all right. He ain't hyar at all, an' even ef he wuz, they wouldn't hurt him. They're after me—thet's all."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm a-goin' ter git out uv this ef I hev ter kill two or three men ter do it," declared her companion fiercely.

The noise on the other side of the iron door was waxing louder, and they could just distinguish the name of Newt Vorce uttered in tones of disgust, and coupled with cries and groans that they knew full well meant a swing from a tree for the owner of it were he to fall into the hands of his pursuers.

"Let 'em yell, I'll fool 'em yet!" hissed Vorce, as he took up a Winchester rifle from a corner, thus showing that he was familiar with the arrangements of the laboratory and knew where to find everything.

He still wore his cartridge-belt, and he took the precaution to load up the rifle afresh.

"They'll be through thet outer door directly. Then the fun will commence, sure! Come this way, Belle."

He sprung through the doorway leading to the secret corridor which terminated in Old Secrecy's big chest in his shanty, and, as Belle followed him, he closed the rocky door.

"We'll hev ter go out through Old Secrecy's shanty, Belle. Hev yer got any horses?"

"No."

"I wuz afraid you hadn't. Wal, we shall hev to go on foot."

"We?"

Belle spoke in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Yes—we. Thet's what I said. Don't yer know that yer father is in danger ez well ez me? I don't suppose ez they'd lynch him, but the officers is on his track ez well ez on mine, an' ef you are any kind uv er daughter you won't desert him now."

"No, indeed. Heaven help me! I'll always stand by my poor old father," exclaimed Belle, fervently.

"Wal, come on, an' quit gassing."

He walked swiftly along the passage, with his Winchester resting in the hollow of his arm, and a six-shooter hanging to his little finger.

He passed the doors that stood in the way, showing that he was well informed in regard to their secret fastenings, and at last paused under the trap that led through the big iron chest into the bedroom of Old Secrecy's shanty.

He put up his hand to touch the spring of the trap.

Then he paused, while the perspiration poured from his forehead and ran down his face.

"Belle," he whispered.

"Yes."

"It's all up with me."

"How?"

"They've blocked my game."

"In what way?"

"Thar's a gang uv them in thet thar room over our heads, an' we're caught like rats in er trap!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH.

THOUGH Belle knew that she personally had nothing to fear in case of discovery, she could

not help trembling in sympathy with her companion on finding how completely they were surrounded.

Perhaps, as she was in no particular danger herself, the spice of adventure allowed a pleasurable sensation of excitement to overwhelm the terror begot by her rather uncomfortable situation.

But Vorce could not see a single redeeming feature in his predicament. Even the presence of the girl that he believed he loved gave him no comfort.

There was no doubt about the shanty being in the possession of a mob. The shuffling of their feet on the floor could be plainly heard, and even their voices as they called to each other while they turned over Old Secrecy's possessions and handled, with profane fingers, the little girlish knick-knacks belonging to Belle.

"I don't think ez they hev discovered ther secret of ther chest yet," observed Vorce, reflectively. "But then, they are sure ter force it open, an' when they do they'll never be satisfied until they've turned everything out of it, and found ther way inter this hyar passage."

Belle admitted to herself the force of this reasoning, but did not make any observation.

"Belle," he continued, "are yer goin' ter stand by me in this hyar thing, or are yer goin' back on me? That's what I want ter know."

Belle looked into his face in the uncertain light. She did not see a threat there, as she had expected, but rather a deep, almost pathetic anxiety that softened the hard lines worn by a life of crime and cruelty.

Had she not read this anxiety there—a desire to have her good-will for its own sake—her answer would not have been what it was. She was prepared to meet a menace with defiance, even if it had meant instant death for her. But, as it was, she was almost disarmed.

"Newt Vorce, I shall not go back on you," she said, quietly.

"You won't?"

He took her hand eagerly, and though she snatched it away with a loathing that she could not repress, he smiled in a pleasant way that showed how much he valued even the semblance of a kind word from the girl.

"I told you that I would not go back on you, but you cannot expect me to take any part in this struggle of yours. If I get shot it will be your fault. I will take that risk, because I cannot very well help myself. But I shall not use my pistol either for or against you—at present."

"That's good enough, Belle. I know I ain't acted ez squar' ter you ez I oughter, but I will ef I ever git outer this hyar scrape."

"Will you?" eagerly.

"I will, sure ez shootin'."

"Well, will you stop trying to get me to marry you, and will you let my father alone?"

"Stop tryin' ter git yer to marry me, Belle? Wal, now, that's kinder hard."

"I don't think so."

"I do."

"I don't."

"Why?"

"Simply because I would die before I would marry you, Newton Vorce, and you know it. Then what is the use of your worrying me continually to do something that can never come to pass?"

"Mebbo there's somethin' in that."

"There is everything in that."

"Wal, Belle, you've done ther right thing by me, an' I've acted ther part uv er skunk ter yer. I'll give yer my promise. Hyar's my hand."

He put his rifle and pistol into his left hand, so that he could give his right to the girl. She took it gingerly, and at once let it drop. The very touch of his hand was repulsive to her, in spite of herself.

"Very well, Newt. Now, how about my father? Will you promise not to interfere with him in future?"

The desperado frowned.

"Belle, I'm willin' ter do anything I kin, but Old Secrecy is er man ez knows his biz. I can't make him do anything ez he don't want ter do."

A loud yell over their heads, and a peculiar crash, told Belle that the searching party had forced open the lid of the big iron-bound chest.

"Thar's not one chance, Belle. Follow me."

With his Winchester and revolver both ready for instant action, Vorce ran back along the passage toward the laboratory.

"Where are you going?" asked Belle.

"I'll show you."

He stopped before he got to the first door in the passage, and stooping down, pulled some loose stones and earth out of an opening in the wall some three feet square.

"Follow me," he said, as he crawled through.

Belle obeyed, and found herself in another corridor, seemingly as capacious as that they had just left, but being in pitch darkness, she could not judge of its dimensions with anything approaching exactitude.

Vorce was busily replacing the loose stones and earth in the hole.

"Those fellows will be down in ther passage in er few minutes, an' we don't want 'em in hyar ef we kin keep 'em out."

He finished his work as he spoke, and taking Belle's hand, in spite of her instinctive resistance, drew her along in the darkness.

"Where are we?" asked the girl, when they had proceeded some distance in this way.

"You will see directly."

A few more steps, and he opened a door. Then he lighted a match, and feeling along the damp wall on his right, found a bull's-eye lantern.

"Thar, Belle, now do you know whar you are?" he asked, as he ignited the wick of the lantern, and allowed its rays to travel about the passage.

"Oh, yes; we're in the stables. But I never knew before that there was any other private way of reaching them besides that from behind the forge."

"I don't suppose you did. Old Secrecy didn't get his name for nothing. He ain't ther man ter tell his business ter any one, not even ter his own gal."

"Let us get along."

Belle did not like to hear anybody talk about her father—particularly Newt Vorce.

The latter shrugged his shoulders, as casting the reflection of his lantern ahead, he walked rapidly forward.

He was going to take a desperate chance, but it was the only one open to him.

He had every reason to suppose that his sister had at last carried out her oft-repeated threat, and put the "boys" on his track. His career as a horse-thief and counterfeiter had been a long and successful one, but he had always pursued it with the apprehension that Susie would some day betray him.

Now he felt that his evil day had come, and that he was indeed holding his life by a thread.

If Susie had set the lynchers on his track it was only reasonable to suppose that she had secured the cellar of her own house, when she knew that he might try to escape that way. Yet he was going to try it.

"Belle!"

"Yes."

"It is more than likely that I shall be rubbed out when I git to ther cellar. I'm only a-goin' to try ter git out thet way 'cause it's ther only chance. See?"

"Yes."

"Wal, thar's er paper ez I holds ez is mighty damagin' to yer dad—Old Secrecy."

"Yes."

"Wal, ef I hev ter pass in my checks, thar's no use lettin' that thar paper git inter ther hands uv people ez might use it ag'in' him."

"Go on."

"So I want ter tell you whar you kin find it after I'm gone, ef I—ef I—meet with an accident. You understand what I mean?"

"I understand."

"Wal, yer take it pretty durned cool. Hows'ever, that thar paper— Take pertick'ler notice, now."

"I am doing so. Go on," said Belle, impatiently.

"Thet thar paper is hidden— Hallo! What's that? Didn't yer hear him?" he exclaimed, suddenly, as he ran forward and listened intently.

"What is it? What do you hear?"

"They're in them passages an' they are in ther cellar. We're caught, sure. Wal, I'll lay out one or two uv 'em, anyhow."

There was murder in his harsh, grating tones as he gripped his rifle, and, dashing his lantern to the ground, rushed to the door leading into the cellar of the Silver Creek Tavern, and flung it wide open.

The cellar was empty.

Vorce stepped cautiously through the doorway and beckoned to Belle. She followed him.

"Belle, you kin stay hyar until I git cl'ar away—ef I do. Ez soon ez yer kin, why kin up to ther dug-out in the mountain. You'll likely find yer father up thar."

"Yes."

"Wal. Good-by."

He ran through the cellar and out of the back door. He could hear the men who were thirsting for his life moving about in front of the tavern.

"Just stay thar for five minutes, an' Newt Vorce kin laugh at all uv yer."

He gave a low whistle and looked furtively around him, keeping close within the shadow of the house as he did so.

"Whar is he, I wonder? Demon! Demon!"

Again he whistled softly.

A peculiar loping struck his ear, and his big black horse ambled up to him.

The desperado passed his hand affectionately over the animal's shining neck. Demon rubbed his nose against his master's cheek.

"Demon, my boy, thar's er tough job afore us."

The horse nestled closer to the rugged cheek of the desperado as if he understood the words.

"Yes, thar's er tough job afore us, an' I want yer ter let yerself out. Ef yer don't, I'm a-thinkin' that this hyar will be our last ride together. You must show them ther bottom uv thet off-hind foot uv yours a hundred times ter ther minute ef yer want ter git me out uv this hyar scrape."

Demon's big intelligent eyes looked straight

into those of the speaker, and Vorce pressed his lips to the horse's nose and kissed it.

"Demon, ther only gal ez I ever cared a dollar fer hates ther sight uv me, an' I ain't got no friend but you. Take me away from this place so ez I kin hev a show when I die, an' I don't care how soon I has to go. But I don't want to die at ther end uv a rope."

There was the suspicion of a tear in the desperado's eye as he hugged the neck of his horse—once more.

Then he sprung on his back, and giving an admonitory pressure with his knees, turned the head of Demon toward the mountains, and started him at a headlong gallop.

Scarcely had he cleared the house when he was seen. A score of cowboys and idlers, who were keeping guard over the front of the hotel, raised a yell as they caught sight of Vorce, on his black horse, tearing away.

Twenty shots from pistols were fired after him, but he was already out of range, and the bullets fell harmlessly behind him.

He turned in his saddle and pointed his Winchester at the crowd, but dropped it without firing.

"What's ther use?" he muttered. "I don't want ter waste cartridges on 'em. I couldn't kill ther whole crowd, an' unless I did it would not be no good. Git up, Demon!"

With a steady "click-click," the hoofs of his black steed took him swiftly toward the mountains. He was safe for the time.

"Pity I couldn't get that thar stuff in the laboratory," he was saying to himself. "It would hev fixed us very comfortably in Chicago. Wal, perhaps I may git it yet. Now for the dug-out, to fix things thar. Then Newt Vorce will make himself scarce from this hyar section."

He gave Demon a cut with his whip without thinking. The horse, surprised at such treatment, swerved to one side and nearly threw his rider.

"Whoa, Demon! Whoa, old fellow! I didn't mean that. I wuz a-thinkin' 'bout something else. Old Secrecy. I wonder what's 'come uv him. I kinder hate ter let him go. An' yet them fellers hed him in ther thicket in Lone Pine Gulch. Wal, they can't find anything against him, an' I guess they'll let him go."

His thoughts roamed a little, and brought Belle's sweet face to his memory. Then they got back to Old Secrecy again, and a black scowl settled on his brow.

"Suppose he should give me away. Suppose it wuz him ez brought that thar crowd to chase me out uv ther shanty. I wonder why I never thought uv that afore. How could Susie know all about ther secret fastenings uv ther doers? Ef I wuz to find that he had a hand in that thing, I'd—I'd— Hallo! Wal, by thunder!"

It was in tones of undoubted astonishment that he uttered the last four words.

He had nearly reached the foot of the mountains, and there, riding slowly out of a canyon, coming into view suddenly round the corner of a rocky wall, was Old Secrecy himself.

"Halloa, Secrecy!"

"Halloa, Vorce, where are you going?"

"Up to ther dug-out. I want you ter come, too."

"I must find Belle first."

"Belle is all right. She's with my sister, Susie, at the Silver Creek Tavern."

"Well, I want to go to her."

"It isn't safe."

"Why not?"

"Because thar's a crowd uv fellers got possession uv ther house, an' they're rakin' it through an' through, from the blacksmith-shop to the laboratory."

"What?" screamed the old man. "Strangers in the shanty? And the safe?"

"Ther safe's all right. Them fellers can't git inter it."

"And Belle?"

"I told yer she wuz all right with Susie. Now come with me ter ther dug-out, fer I tell yer things is mighty hot an' onpleasant hyar."

"Belle is all right, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then take me where you like."

And Newt Vorce and Old Secrecy rode up the mountain together.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

"Don't hurt him. He's such an amusing cuss."

Thus spoke Silas Quick, as Death-Grip and Bob Brace secured Jake Drum and disarmed him.

There was a decidedly sarcastic ring in the lawyer's tones, and Jake writhed under it. He could better bear to be roughly handled physically, than to submit to animadversions on his personal appearance.

"You're pretty smart for a tenderfoot," snarled Jake, "but if I wasn't a better-looking fellow than a Chicago lawyer, I'd never comb my hair again."

Quick looked at Jake's shock of red hair in a significant way that made the little man wriggle in uncontrollable indignation.

"Never mind, Jake. Come along. We'll get

up a duel between you and the lawyer after awhile—cannon, at ten paces," laughed Death-Grip.

Jake was too indignant to speak; but he looked at Silas with an expression that boded no good to the Chicago lawyer, if the dwarf should ever be in the ascendant again.

Jack Noble and Bob Brace made sure that Jake was entirely without weapons, and then Death-Grip ordered him to ride ahead of the party toward the dug-out.

Jake looked around him, saw that he had no choice, and, with a very bad grace, obeyed the command.

"Here's the place," said Jake, sullenly, as they stood in front of the bush that concealed the entrance to the dug-out.

"Well, open it," was Death-Grip's response.

Jake Drum showed, by the manner in which he led the way into the dug-out, that he was perfectly familiar with the place, and Death-Grip nodded significantly to Brace and Noble.

"We shall have to make you safe, Jake," observed Death-Grip, as he drew a pair of small and light, but strong, steel handcuffs, from his pocket, and snapped them on the dwarf's wrists.

"I wish you would straighten my necktie," was all Jake said, as he dropped upon a box with the air of a man resigned to anything.

"I'll do it. Let me straighten your necktie. I should like to have the job of dressing you. I don't think I should recommend a red necktie, though."

As Silas Quick thus spoke he walked over to Jake with a malevolent smile, and his hands out as if with the amiable intention of clutching the little man's throat and choking him to death.

Jake allowed him to get within comfortable distance, and then, bending forward, he butted his red head into the lawyer's stomach, with a force that sent the gentleman from Chicago reeling out of the room with a complete somersault.

"Confound you! I'll turn you inside out," spluttered Quick, as he got to his feet and made a rush at Jake. But the dwarf was too smart to wait for him. He jumped behind the table, and as the lawyer came for him, crawled out between his legs and overthrew him again.

Silas was now in a boiling rage. He scrambled up, and drawing his pistol, pointed it at the head of his tormentor.

Death-Grip, who had been laughing heartily at the antics of the two, hit the weapon just as it was discharged, or Jake Drum's career would have come to a sudden end. The bullet passed within a few inches of his head, as it was, for the lawyer's aim had been very true, and he shot to kill.

"Take him back, there," said Death-Grip to Jack Noble, "or there will be murder done yet. Isn't there any way to make him safe?"

"I dunno. What's this hyar?" answered Jack Noble, as he opened a heavy door in the extreme rear of the dug-out—a door not more than four feet high by three wide.

An examination of the place behind the door showed it to be a mere closet, cut into the solid earth, entirely empty and with no light save what came through a few small holes in the door. The latter was of solid oak and was very thick, being strengthened moreover by a number of large spikes driven into it from the inside.

"What is this place for?"

Death-Grip asked the question with a puzzled air that showed he was willing to accept any reasonable explanation.

"I'll tell you," said the lawyer, confidently.

"I wish you would. It would give me a better opinion than ever of Chicago smartness."

"We pride ourselves in Chicago on being smart."

"Too smart," put in Jake, *sotto voce*.

"It is my opinion," continued the lawyer, not heeding Drum's remark, "that this little closet is used as sort of a retreat by the owner of this establishment. You see it is practically impregnable. A fellow can get inside, close the door, and defy an army."

"Ah!"

"The door is too thick to be battered down, and is bulletproof. The loop-holes enable the man inside, with a repeating rifle and plenty of ammunition to blaze away continually, commanding every part of the outer chamber, and it would be almost impossible to dislodge him. There is my opinion, as a simple citizen. You can accept it or not, as you see fit."

Death-Grip nodded and led Jake into the place.

"You may as well lie down and take a nap, Jake. You may have to stay in here for sometime," observed the detective. "Here, I'll take those bracelets off. I guess you cannot do any harm in here, and I do not want to be cruel."

"Now, what's the next move?" asked the lawyer, when Jake Drum had been disposed of, and the door of the closet secured on the outside. "I can't afford to stay here very long. I offered to help in running down those scoundrels who stopped the coach. One of them, I have every reason to suppose, is our eccentric little friend in there. The other I should like to find."

"My plan is to stay here, because Vorce is sure

to come before long. He has discovered that the hunt for him has commenced, and I am confident that he will come to the dug-out to gather up portable property he has, and then leave for parts unknown."

"But I want to find the man known as Grant Ormsby."

"Grant Ormsby? Who in thunder is Grant Ormsby?" asked Bob Brace.

"Why, Old Secrecy. That's who he means. Didn't you know that his name in the past was Ormsby?" said Noble.

"By gosh. I had forgotten all erbout it. Wal, I'll tell yer whar Old Secrecy is. He's down in— Say, Dick Young, whar is ther old man anyhow? You hed him last."

Quick looked quickly from Bob Brace to Death-Grip, as he waited for the latter's answer.

"He's—he's—down in the thicket, I suppose," was the detective's hesitating reply.

"Then let's go down and find him, by all means. I just caught sight of the old fellow once, and then he dodged away like a will-o'-the-wisp. My principal business in Colorado is to find him—and his daughter."

"His daughter?"

"Yes. By the way, if you know Grant Ormsby, you must be acquainted with his daughter, Belle?"

"Belle? Yes, I know her, of course," answered Death-Grip, with a confusion that the astute lawyer noted though he did not say so.

"Well, where is she?"

"At her home, in the village of Silver Creek."

"Silver Creek? Do you mean to say that I have been thick-headed enough to come right through that place, when I was looking for Grant Ormsby, without knowing that he was within reach of my hand. I'm a driveling idiot, and if it was known in Chicago, the firm of Quick & Slamm would be the laughing-stock of the whole profession."

The lawyer was working himself up into a tremendous state of excitement, and raved up and down the floor of the dug-out like a madman.

"I must find that man," he roared. "I must find him, at whatever cost."

"He is safe enough. You can find him. He has been living in Silver Creek for some time, and is not likely to disappear now," said Death-Grip.

"I don't know about that. He was with that fellow Vorce. Why was he with Vorce? What was his connection with Vorce? Vorce is not an honest man. He is a horse-thief, that has been proved. He may be guilty of other crimes. Probably he is. Very well, then. Why was Grant Ormsby with Vorce? Men are known by their friends. Grant Ormsby seems to be a friend of Vorce's. Why is he a friend of Vorce's? Answer me that?"

The lawyer delivered himself of this tirade in the bullying manner that he had always found effective in the Chicago law courts. He shook his finger at each of his companions in turn, and banged his fist on the table at the end of each short sentence.

"We do not know that he is a friend of Newton Vorce's, do we?" hazarded Death-Grip.

"Why was he with him?"

"It may have been an accidental encounter."

"Men do not accidentally encounter each other in the mountains, several miles from the nearest settlement at five o'clock in the morning, without some unusual cause to bring them there. Accidental encounter is good, but decidedly thin."

Death-Grip confessed to himself that the lawyer's reasoning was sound, but he could not bring himself to admit that he had released Old Secrecy and told him to go quietly home, for the sake of his daughter. The young man knew that he had in this acted unprofessionally, but he had the excuse of being deeply in love with Belle Ormsby, and he could not help trying to assist her father.

"I have a good mind to start for Silver Creek at once and try and find him," said Quick, after a pause. "We do not know how long it will be before Vorce comes up here, and we are not even sure that he will come at all."

"Yes, we are. He will come before very long. I will stake anything on that," answered the detective.

"How are you going to find him anyhow?" put in Bob Brace. "It won't be no use yer goin' ter his home. He bez some back room or other whar he hides himself, an' he won't come out fer nothin' or nobody, unless he feels like it. Yer only chance would be ter find Belle, an' she wouldn't tell yer whar ther old man wuz, unless she knew yer, an' wuz sart'in ez yer wuz all straight."

"I'll risk all that."

Lawyer Quick was not the man to be dissuaded when he had made up his mind to do anything. It was his determined obstinacy and bull-dog pluck that had made him a successful lawyer, and these qualities had stood him in good stead since he had been engaged in his present expedition in the Rocky Mountains.

"I don't ask any one to go with me," he declared. "I'll just take that horse of mine, (I suppose it is mine now, for I've ridden him long enough to establish ownership), and I'll

ride down the mountain to Silver Creek. Then I think I can persuade Miss Belle Ormsby to introduce me to her father."

Death-Grip good-naturedly assisted the lawyer to get his horse ready, and persuaded him to take two revolvers and a knife with him. He would have slung a Winchester across Mr. Quick's shoulder too, but the latter decidedly objected to this, saying that he "wasn't going to make a walking arsenal of himself for any man. He could kill all the men he wanted with the two pop-guns and a carving-knife."

"Wal, good-luck ter yer, lawyer," yelled Bob Brace, after Mr. Quick, as the latter threw himself across his broncho and rode at a swift trot down the path.

"Pig-headed old rooster!" commented Jake Noble. "Bound ter hev his own way ef he kin git it."

"Something we are all striving for, I guess," added Death-Grip, quietly.

"Halloa! Halloa! Look out for him. He's coming that way!" bawled the lawyer's voice ten minutes later, and they saw Mr. Quick, in a state of wild excitement, riding back swiftly and waving his arms over his head.

"What's ther matter, lawyer?" cried Bob Brace, laughing. "Who bev yer met?"

"Both of them," was the breathless reply.

"They are over our heads, confound them! They saw me, and they turned off in some way and got back into the mountains."

"Horses and all?"

"No. Their horses are down on the path below there, near the spot where that rock sticks out."

"And you say they turned off into the mountains when they saw you coming? I suppose you mean Vorce and Old Secrecy?" asked Death-Grip, with a serious face.

"Yes."

"That means mischief. Vorce knows that there is danger for him up here, and he is going to execute a flank movement on us, if he can."

"Well, he must be anxious to gain some point or he would never go scrambling up the mountain in that reckless way. But I wouldn't care for him so much if he hadn't taken my man, Grant Ormsby, with him. It's a strange thing how a man will run away from good fortune sometimes," grumbled Quick.

"Good fortune, did yer say?" asked Noble, quickly.

"Never mind," was the lawyer's short reply.

"Boys, we must get ourselves ready for a tussle, because Vorce must be taken this morning, and he is going to try all he knows to prevent it. I expect he will drop in upon us directly from a direction that we don't suspect. Let us examine the path and outside of the ranch generally. It is certain that he cannot get at us from the inside."

As Death-Grip spoke he glanced carelessly into the dug-out.

Bang! went a rifle from the interior of the place, and a sharp, stinging sensation in his arm told him that he had been hit by a bullet. At the same time a curl of white smoke from one of the loop-holes in the thick door of the closet showed that the precautions taken to make Jake Drum harmless had failed.

CHAPTER XXV.

VORCE'S NEMESIS.

LET us go back a little and see what was going on outside Old Secrecy's shanty when Vorce and Belle were having such an exciting experience within.

The continued theft of horses had aroused the community to a determination to catch the marauders, if possible. Newt Vorce had been spotted as the ringleader if not the sole thief, and his movements had been shadowed by more than Death-Grip during the past twenty-four hours.

When Vorce suddenly appeared before Belle in the laboratory, he had escaped only by a scratch from the howling crowd outside.

There is nothing more exciting than a man-hunt, particularly when the quarry is a horse-thief, and Vorce could expect but little mercy from his pursuers, should he fall into their hands.

But how had they found their way into the very heart of Old Secrecy's retreat?

When Susie left Belle outside the Silver Creek Tavern after their ride from the mountains she found her bar-room and the adjoining apartment where she was accustomed to hold sway, full of men.

"Ha! Here's Susie. How d'ye do, Susie?"

A tall man, with a big beard and twinkling blue eyes which flashed from beneath the big brim of his slouch hat, was the speaker, and he slapped Susie familiarly on the back as he did

"Not quite so much familiarity," was Susie's response, as she seized the big fellow by the shoulders, and dexterously thrusting her foot behind him, sent him spinning to the floor, by means of the well-known wrestling trick, a "back-beel."

"Good for you, Susie! Good for you!" laughed a burly cowboy at her elbow.

"There, that's enough. I don't want any talk about what I do. I know my biz," ob-

served Susie, with a defiant glance around her. "Yank Storey, get up out of that, or I'll throw a bottle at you."

The big fellow, who had lain where he had been thrown, looking up with a comical expression of surprise, here slowly rolled to his feet, but stood at a respectful distance from the hostess of the Silver Creek Tavern.

As will be conjectured, Yank Storey was the regular driver of the Leadville coach, whose place Death-Grip had taken for the memorable trip when the equipage was held up in Lone Pine Gulch. He had been "sick," but it was a sickness to which he was very subject, and could be traced to an over-indulgence in the fiery liquor dispensed in the small towns through which the coach passed. He had recovered from his last attack now, and was unusually spry and high-spirited.

"Well, now, boys, what's ther excitement?" asked Susie, as having taken her place behind the bar, she looked with the air of a queen over the assemblage.

"You tell her, Yank. You're ther best talker around hyar. Go ahead an' spout."

"Wal, boys, I dunno about that thar," answered Yank, with becoming hesitation. "I hev shot off my mouth on a few occasions, I know, an' ther boys seemed ter think that what I said wuz purty good, but I ain't no reg'lar orator."

"Oh, give us a rest, Yank. Git up on er chair an' explain this hyar matter," interrupted the other, impatiently.

It was evident that Mr. Storey was desirous of exhibiting his oratorical abilities, but that he considered it bad form to commence in too much of a hurry.

He coughed and took off his hat and fanned himself, and looked benignly around on the assembly. Then he struck a responsive chord in every bosom.

"All hands take er drink."

The dozen or so of gentlemen present waltzed up to the bar and swallowed their "slugs" of whisky like so many pills, while Miss Susie kept a wary eye on them to make sure that no one secured more than one drink.

The whisky disposed of and paid for by Mr. Storey, that gentleman was hoisted upon a table, with his face toward Susie, who rested her chin in her hands, and her elbows on the bar, in an attitude of deep attention.

"Yer see, Susie," commenced Yank, "thar's er sart'in man around hyar who hev been doin' er considerable sight uv horse-tradin' lately."

"Hear! hear!" cried the burly cowboy.

"Shet yer mouth," broke in several indignant voices. "Let Yank talk."

"Wal," resumed the orator, "this hyar horse-tradin' would be all right ef so be ez it warn't so consarnedly one-sided. It hev ended in ther sart'in man gittin' er lot uv horses without payin' anythin' fer 'em to ther parties ez formerly owned 'em."

"Well, what are you telling all this to me for?" asked Susie.

Yank Storey looked sheepishly around in the hope that some of his companions would come to his assistance, but Susie Vorce was gazing at them with a stormy glance that none of them quite understood.

"I asked you what you are telling this to me for?" she requested, in a hard tone.

"Wal—wal, yer see, Susie, we thought ez—ez—yer ought ter be told something erbout it, 'cause—'cause, yer see, it's er—er—sorter relation uv yours ez—ez—"

Yank Storey trailed off in a feeble sort of way, and at last stopped in a mud-hole of incoherent utterances.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Susie sharply. "I think you are a fool."

"Yes, mum. I think so myself. But—er—"

"Yank Storey, I shall knock you off that table directly, if you don't quit acting in that mushy way. I suppose you want to tell me that you are after Newt Vorce, and you are afraid, because he is my brother, and you think I might clean out the whole crowd of you."

"Thet's erbout so!" grunted the big cowboy from behind the table.

"Oh, that's about so, is it?" said Susie, with a contemptuous sniff. "Well, now, boys, listen to me."

"We're a-listenin'," very humbly from Yank Storey.

"Git up on ther table, Susie!" suggested the burly cowboy.

"What's that?" demanded Susie sharply, and the cowboy subsided.

"Keep quiet, an' let's hear Susie!" put in Yank severely.

"Well, boys, all I want to say is just this: Newt Vorce is my brother. That is, he is the son of my father, who married my mother when he was a widower."

"Oho!" ejaculated Storey, with a nod of intelligence.

"So you see," went on Susie, "he isn't exactly my brother."

"Half-brother," suggested the cowboy timidly, for Susie showed a disposition to crush him every time he spoke, and he felt that he was allowed to speak only under protest.

"Half-brother, yes, that's right," acquiesced Susie graciously, and the cowboy felt that he had made a hit.

"Wal, then, that changes ther thing altogether!" declared Storey.

"Yes, you suspect Newt Vorce of being a horse-thief, and you are going to run him down. Well, boys, I'm with you."

As Susie spoke, she came out from behind the bar and gave her hand to Yank Storey. In a minute her hand had been clasped by every man in the house, and they all felt that the capture of Newton Vorce would be a very easy matter now.

"What d'ye think we'd better do first, Susie?" asked Yank Storey deferentially, as, having jumped from the table, he stood before her awaiting orders.

"I should think you had better follow him the way you saw him go. I always knew that there was some way into a place he has here, about the spot you tell me of, but he never gave it away to me."

"We know whar it is. I bet yer we'll turn everything inside out but what we'll find him."

It was decided that one force should go to the place where Vorce had been seen to go in under an embankment, where it was evident there was a concealed door, another should force their way into Old Secrecy's shanty, and a third should watch the cellar of the Silver Creek Tavern.

Susie Vorce had concealed nothing from them, but could not tell them more about the hiding-place in the cellar than that her brother had used some old passages and rooms branching off from the cellar proper for purposes of his own that he had never revealed to her.

The men, all armed with revolvers, and some with Winchesters, separated to take the duties assigned them, and Susie, accompanied by Yank Storey, went over to Old Secrecy's shanty.

They tried the bell, but there was no response.

"Belle went in to get a sleep," said Susie, thoughtfully. "She was tired out, I know, and I guess would sleep through any racket. I don't care to trust her in there with Newton, and for anything I know he may have some way of getting into Old Secrecy's place without going in the front door. Get a crowbar and open that door, Storey."

Yank needed no second command. He ran across to the tavern and returned with a heavy iron bar, sharpened and curved at one end. With this he easily forced the door open, and soon he, Susie, and five companions stood in the blacksmith shop of Old Secrecy, looking curiously in every direction.

It is unnecessary to repeat, what the reader already knows—that Newt Vorce heard the noise of voices and footsteps overhead in the back room, and that, retreating by way of the cellar, he got away on his faithful horse, Demon, followed by bullets from his baffled pursuers.

As soon as they saw that Vorce had escaped them for the present, the men, with Yank Storey and Susie, ran down into the cellar.

"Durn his ngly picter, who'd ha' thought he'd ha' throwed off thet way," growled Yank.

Suddenly he started back, overcome by superstitious fear.

"See thar! What is it? It's er ghost, sure," he stammered.

"Get out of the way, you fool," retorted Susie, as she pushed him to one side, and ran forward toward the "ghost."

"Why, Belle," she cried, "how did you get down here?"

Belle returned Susie's warm pressure of the hands with interest, as she exclaimed:

"Oh, Susie, I don't know what has become of my poor father. And they've broken into the house, and upset the things in his laboratory, and ruined everything."

The girl sobbed as she said this, but Susie patted her cheeks kindly and poured cheering words into her ear with good effect.

"You big slob! What are you standing there for, gaping like a chicken in moultin' time?" Susie suddenly demanded, turning on Yank Storey, who seemed considerably mystified by the appearance of Belle.

Belle was soon ensconced in Susie's own room in the Silver Creek Tavern, and before Yank Storey had concluded his examination of Newt Vorce's stable underground, had forgotten all her troubles in the deep refreshing sleep only vouchsafed to innocence and youth.

When the crowd found that Old Secrecy's place was empty they came out without disturbing the contents of the house or laboratory to any serious extent. They discovered the secret entrance to the passage through the chest in the back room, and expressed considerable astonishment therat, but did not attempt to interfere with the general contents of the shanty. Perhaps the strict orders to the contrary issued by Susie Vorce could be thanked for this. In any case, poor Belle's lamentations with regard to the general upset were hardly warranted by the event.

A council of war was held in the bar-room of the Silver Creek Tavern as soon as it was realized that Vorce had escaped for the present.

"I believe in chasing him right up to the mountains. He's bed too softer thing with ther horses hereabouts, an' I think ez it's er dooty we owe ter society to wipe him out."

Thus spoke Yank Storey and his sentiments met with the hearty approval of the burly cowboy. The rest of the men, while they agreed with the speaker, were not disposed to devote any more time to the hunt for such a slippery customer as Newt Vorce.

"All right, boys; ef yer don't want ter go, why, I'll trot erlong with Yank, an' ef we bring him back, thar will be er hangin', you kin bet," cried the cowboy.

"Wal, come on. Let's talk about what we'll do when we bring him back," admonished Yank, as he and the cowboy sprung upon their horses and galloped toward the mountains.

"At last, Newt Vorce, you have gone too far with me, an' I'll give you up if you were twenty times my half-brother," muttered Susie, as she stood on the veranda, and thoughtfully watched the two men out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BELLE FINDS A RELATIVE.

As they reached the foot of the mountains in the distance and rounded a bluff out of sight, Susie rubbed her eyes and tried to make out the nature of another object that came into sight just as the men disappeared.

She saw that it was a vehicle of some kind, but it was ten minutes or so before she could be sure that it was a nondescript affair belonging to the landlord of the hotel in the next town.

It was not exactly a buggy, or a dog-cart, or a barouche, or a farmer's wagon, but possessed some of the characteristics of all four. Its wheels were heavy like those of a wagon; it had a buggy-top; high shafts like a dog-cart, and two handsome lamps such as are usually seen on a well-appointed barouche.

"What does this mean?" thought Susie. "It appears to me like a woman driving."

The crowd of idlers and cowboys who had been so active in searching for Vorce in Old Secrecy's shanty were now dispersing in various directions, many of them riding off to the cattle-ranch in the opposite direction to that of Vorce's dug-out in the mountains. Only three or four still hung about the bar-room and veranda of the tavern, talking about the hunt, and the escape of the fugitive.

The vehicle came bowling across the prairie, the woman holding the reins with the air of one accustomed to the occupation, and plying the whip occasionally on the backs of the span of horses as either showed a disposition to lag.

"Drives well," commented Susie.

"Who's her jags?" said a young fellow who assisted Miss Vorce in the rougher work of the tavern and managed things during her absence.

Susie's only answer to this irreverent question was a look, and the young man wished that he had not spoken.

The carriage at last reached the veranda of the Silver Creek Tavern, and as the young man aforesaid stepped forward the driver said, imperiously:

"Help me down. The horses will stand."

The young man did as he was ordered, and assisted a lady of mature years, with snow-white hair framing a determined-looking face, to step upon the veranda.

It was the lady who had been addressed as "Mrs. Smith" by Lawyer Quick, and who had been inside the stage-coach when it was "held up" by Newton Vorce and Jake Drum.

Miss Susan Vorce was half-disposed to resent the sharp speech of the stranger to the young man. Susie did not like to have her subordinates snubbed by any one but herself. She looked upon such a proceeding as something in the nature of an affront offered to herself. But there was something in the air of careless hauteur with which this white-haired lady assumed the right to crush everybody she met that awed even the independent Susie Vorce.

"You are the landlady of the Silver Creek Tavern, I presume, eh?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I require a room."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You have one for me, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well. Take me inside and give me a cup of tea. I am faint and tired. I have driven over from the next town, and it's a long way."

"Yes, ma'am."

Susie Vorce actually could not find anything more than "Yes, ma'am" to say.

Her visitor glanced at her as if she was some sort of natural curiosity, and stalked into the house as if she was its owner. Susie followed her in a state of inward perturbation that threatened to result in an explosion at any moment.

"Where is Belle Ormsby?" snapped Mrs. Smith, half an hour later, as, having washed her face and removed her bonnet in the bedroom she was to occupy, she sat in Susie Vorce's snuggerly discussing tea; eggs and ham with her hostess.

Susie started as this question was flung at her

without any warning, but the white-haired lady went on sipping her tea as if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to ask Miss Vorce for a girl that she might not even have heard of.

The landlady sat back in her chair staring at the stranger, but did not answer.

"I asked you, where is Belle Ormsby?" repeated Mrs. Smith, after a pause.

"Belle Ormsby?" repeated Susie, mechanically.

"Yes, Belle Ormsby—daughter of Grant Ormsby. Don't I speak plainly? Bless the woman! I thought I was talking English! Why don't you answer?"

The white-haired lady was getting impatient, and she evinced a disposition to seize Miss Vorce and shake some speech out of her.

"Do you know Belle Ormsby?" asked Susie.

"Do I know her? No, I do not. I did know her. Knew her mother, too. But haven't seen Belle since she was a baby. Now, I want to see her."

All this from Mrs. Smith with great volubility and acerbity.

"You knew her mother?"

"Yes, I told you so. What is the matter with the woman? Do you think I'm an ogress, or a kidnapper, or a cannibal? It seems to me that the people are all fools in this part of the country."

The white-haired lady gulped down a cupful of hot tea in her impatience, and coughed so violently that she could not express her indignation for some minutes. Susie looked at her the while, trying to get her ideas together.

"I don't know whether I know Belle Ormsby or not," said Susie slowly, at last.

"You are lying," said Mrs. Smith, calmly.

"What?" shrieked Susie, as she sprung from her chair and put a revolver under the other's nose. The insult had broken the spell under which she had labored since her visitor's arrival.

"Don't pull the trigger, my good woman, or it will be the worse for you. My lawyer is not far away, and if I were to meet with injury at the hands of anybody here, he would hang a dozen of you."

Mrs. Smith had not stirred or showed the least emotion at Susie's threatening movement, and now took a bite of bread and butter with an air of great relish and enjoyment.

"Put that ridiculous weapon down and answer my question," she went on, with her mouth full.

Miss Vorce obeyed. She did not know what else to do. In spite of her quick temper, or perhaps because of it—she had a keen appreciation of humor, and she burst into a fit of hearty laughter at the idea of being bullied and insulted in her own house.

"Where is Belle Ormsby?" again asked the white-haired lady, as if she had never put the question before.

"Why do you ask?"

"I am her aunt."

"Her aunt? What, the rich aunt that lives in Chicago? The aunt that her father quarreled with eighteen years ago, when he left the city and came West?" gasped Susie. "The aunt that is such a disagreeable old thing, who hounded her brother, Grant Ormsby, out of his own house, and sent him away without a penny?"

"You seem to know me," said Mrs. Smith, grimly, as she poured herself out another cup of tea.

"What do you want with Belle?"

"None of your business," retorted Mrs. Smith, tartly.

"No, I suppose it isn't," answered Susie, slowly, "but Belle is a friend of mine. I've always taken an interest in the child, and I should not like to be the means of bringing her trouble."

Mrs. Smith reached across the table and grasped Susie's hand.

"I like you," said Mrs. Smith, giving Susie's hand a good shake. "Show me where Belle is and rest assured that I shall not hurt her. You are her friend, eh? Well, I'm glad of it, for you're a good woman. I can see it in your face."

Without another word, Susie arose, still with her hand in that of her visitor, and led the latter down a corridor to a room at the back of the house. She threw open the door and pointed to a bed upon which lay Belle Ormsby fast asleep.

The white-haired lady walked quietly over to the sleeper, and bending down, kissed her on the cheek. Then she tip-toed out of the room and gently closing the door, led Susie back to the room in which they had been sitting.

"What is she doing here? I thought Grant Ormsby had a home of his own in Silver Creek. I was told so this morning."

"He has, but he is not in it. In fact, I do not know whether he will venture back to Silver Creek at all."

"Why not?"

"He is suspected of being in an illegal business."

"What do you mean?"

"Horse-stealing."

"Impossible!"

Susie shrugged her shoulders.

"The men are up in arms in this neighborhood. They have traced stolen horses to one man here, and Grant Ormsby—or Old Secrecy, as he is generally called in Silver Creek—has been a partner of that man."

"Who is the man?"

"My brother."

"Your brother?" in tones of intense astonishment.

"Yes, my brother—Newton Vorce."

"Where do you think Grant Ormsby is now? Is he with your brother?"

"I expect so."

"Do you think you could find them?"

"I do."

"Will you?"

Susie looked at the other with a strange expression.

"I do not think it would be wise to go after them now. There are one or two parties of men on their track, and it might be difficult to gain an interview with Grant Ormsby until the excitement is cooled off a little."

"Well," said the white-haired lady. "I am in this part of the country to find my brother, Grant Ormsby, and his child, and I don't care how many men are on his track, I am going to find him. When I make up my mind to do a thing, I generally do it. Eugenia Ormsby is not the woman to give up her purpose on account of a few men, even if they do wear broad-brimmed hats, rough clothes and revolvers. Will you give me the address of Mr. Vorce, if you know it?"

"He is up in the mountains."

"I suppose so. Well, whereabouts? I don't expect to find him in a brown-stone mansion, with a brass bell-handle and a varnished front door."

"You could never find him by yourself, and it isn't a good road for a lady who is a stranger in these parts. You will have to get a guide."

"Nonsense!"

"You will."

"Humbug!"

"But you cannot go by yourself."

"Fudge!"

"It is impossible."

"Humph!"

"You must have some one to guide you."

"I must, eh? Well, I'll show you that I can find my way by myself if you will only tell me where the heathenish place is."

"You must have a guide," repeated Susie Vorce, doggedly.

"Must I? Well, where shall I get one? Who will take the risk that you tell me exists, and take me to Grant Ormsby?"

"I will."

Both turned, and the white-haired lady ran over to the young girl who stood, pale, but determined, just inside the door.

"Belle Ormsby, and the very picture of your father in his young days," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as she clasped the girl to her bosom.

"Auntie!"

"Yes, my dear, your Aunt Eugenia, who, according to our friend here, is such a disagreeable old thing," with a glance at Susie Vorce.

"You're not, are you, auntie?"

"Well, my dear, I don't believe I am the most amiable creature in the world, but perhaps I am not so black as I have been painted. Anyhow, I am going to take you and your papa to Chicago, where you will be known to the world as one of the richest young ladies in the West."

"Rich?"

"Yes, my dear. But I'll explain it all to you afterward. I have come out here only to find you. Mr. Quick, who is my lawyer, and a very shrewd man, has dragged me from one place to the other, with little to eat, and no decent place to sleep for the last month, in the hope of finding you. Now, he has gone off on some wild-goose chase after a wretch that tried to rob us in the coach, thinking that he had a clew to your father. As soon as he had gone, I got into conversation with the landlord of the hotel in the next town (a very fat man, my dear), and he told me that Grant Ormsby, generally known as Old Secrecy, lived in Silver Creek. As soon as I heard that I got into a wagon and drove over here. If I can only find Grant, now, after tracing you here, I'll make Mr. Quick feel cheap for the rest of his life. He thinks no one can do anything but himself."

Mrs. Smith, as we will continue to call her, laughed as she thought of the lawyer's discomfiture.

"Auntie," whispered Belle, "I am afraid papa is in danger. I will go with you at once. I have rested for an hour or two, and feel quite strong," she added, quickly, as she anticipated an objection from Susie.

"Well, my dear, how are we going to get there—in the wagon?"

"We must go on horseback," said Susie.

"Horseback? Bless me, I haven't ridden for twenty years. Never mind, I'll try it. I'll get to Grant Ormsby if I have to ride a Bengal tiger."

Three strong and fresh little mustangs were soon got ready, and except that there was some slight trouble in getting Mrs. Smith into the

saddle, the departure of that lady and her two companions was unmarked by incident.

Once properly seated, the white-haired lady brought her previous equestrian experience to her assistance, and presented a very creditable appearance as she speeded toward the mountains in her search for Old Secrecy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VORCE AND OLD SECRECY HOLD THE FORT.

AS soon as Jake Drum was shut up in the little closet in Vorce's dug-out, he began to cast about him for some way of escape. This was not the first time he had been in the place by a good many, and he knew more about its arrangements than even Vorce suspected.

He looked through the loopholes in the door to make sure that Death-Grip and his three companions were not likely to disturb him in a hurry.

He saw Quick go away, and the others looking after him and laughing.

"I'll have to get even with that lawyer before I am through," he muttered, "but let him go for the present. I wish I had some soap and water and a towel in here," he added, as his personal appearance began to cause him anxiety.

He arranged his necktie as well as he could, brushed off his knee-pants, and betrayed an agonizing apprehension that his boy's shirt-waist had been crumpled during the rough experience of the past night.

"It's no use," he sighed, "I'm all broken up, but I'll fix myself up when I get home—if I ever do get there. I'll get Miss Belle to give me a new piece of ribbon and tie it on for me. She will take care of me."

Jake's face softened as he thought of the girl. She was his angel—his guiding-star, and whatever there was of goodness in his nature sprung into activity at the sound of her voice or the touch of her hand.

"I dunno why I should stay in here," he went on. "I have got into rather a bad box this time with that Newt Vorce, but if I once get out of this scrape I'll never be into another one. I don't mind doing 'most anything for the Governor, but I think he asks almost too much when he wants me to run the risk of banging. He saved my life that time, certainly, and I'm thankful to him for it, but I must draw the line somewhere."

Jake was carefully examining his small prison cell while thus reflecting, and had now found something at the back that seemed to interest him greatly.

"Mighty smart, those fellows!" he muttered. "Looked all around here—on the floor and at the walls, and everywhere except in the right place. Seems to me that I would have suspected this place at first if I had been them. Might have known that it wasn't put here for ornament. If they had looked up to the roof they might have caught on to the idea that it was only another doorway to the dug-out."

He scraped around the rear wall and discovered that there were several holes in which he could put his feet and hands, forming a ladder reaching to the top of the closet.

He took one more look through the loophole to make sure that everything was safe outside, and then, with considerable agility, scrambled up the wall.

"Now, where is the hole, I wonder?"

He pushed his head against the rocky ceiling in several places before he uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"Here is a soft place! Mr. Vorce is a pretty good man at arranging traps and things of that kind. I'm afraid he is a rather bad man."

Jake shook his big red head in humorous reproof of Mr. Vorce until he nearly shook himself from his perch, only saving himself by the most vigorous clawing at the wall.

He pushed his head at the soft place in the ceiling with all his force, and was rewarded with a shower of dirt pouring into his hair and down his neck.

He tried to brush the dirt from his red necktie, and again nearly fell, but recovered himself quickly.

Another effort, and Jake's head had pushed up a trap-door, showing an opening big enough for him to crawl through, and no more.

Without hesitation, he crawled through and found himself in a narrow path, completely hidden from that in front of the dug-out by huge masses of rock that looked as if they had never been disturbed since the creation.

The path he stood on was apparently not more than a few yards long—on the east ending in a high wall that was utterly unscalable, and on the west running up by a winding and rough way to he knew not whither.

"Never was up here before," he said softly, "but I know there is a way of getting to Silver Creek by it somehow. So, here we go."

He closed the trap-door, and threw some earth on it, as had been done before. Then he turned his face to the west and began to push his way up the mountain.

"Halt, thar!" commanded a gruff voice, in guarded tones—a voice that he recognized instantly as that of Newton Vorce.

Jake looked in every direction, but could see nobody.

The path he was pursuing was a mere split in a solid rock, with overhanging boulders threatening at every moment to come tumbling upon his head.

He went on another step.

"Halt! Do you hear me? I'll drop a ton uv stone on yer head ef yer don't do ez I tell yer."

"Oh, you are there, are you, Mr. Vorce? I didn't see you at first," said Jake, politely.

He had just caught a glimpse of Newton Vorce's face peering cautiously over a rock about fifty feet over his head.

"That you, Jake?" demanded Vorce.

"Yes."

"Whar did yer kim from?"

"From the dug-out."

"From ther dug-out? Wal, how did yer git up hyar?"

"By the door that you fixed yourself, I guess."

"Seems ter me thet everybody's makin' themselves familiar with my dcors," grumbled Vorce.

"Whar's thet thar durned lawyer?"

Jake Drum was walking up toward the desperado as this colloquy progressed, but he stopped suddenly as this last question was put to him.

"Whar's thet thar lawyer, I asked yer."

"Well, the fact is," stammered Jake, "that he got away."

Vorce frowned.

"Got away? Wal, why didn't you foller him? Thar's trouble enough around hyar without lettin' a blabbin' fool like thet thar go tellin' all he knows about our business."

"I couldn't follow him. Bob Brace, Jack Noble and that Eastern fellow, Dick Young, who is sweet on Miss Belle, took the lawyer away from me and then clucked me into that little closet in the dug-out. I wouldn't stay there, of course, when I found a way out, and that's why I came here."

"I thought you'd been playin' some fool game," growled Vorce. "Secrecy," he added, speaking to some one behind the rocks who was invisible to Jake, "thet accounts for our seein' thet lawyer down on ther mule-path. I s'pose he wuz ridin' fer more help ter clean us out, eh?"

"Secrecy? Is Mr. Ormsby with you?" asked Jake, eagerly.

"Yes, he's hyar."

"I am very glad."

The dwarf reached the spot occupied by Vorce and Old Secrecy at this moment. He grasped the hand of the latter, and shook it with every demonstration of regard and respect.

Old Secrecy, too, seemed to be glad to see his faithful little friend, and awoke from his usual lethargic state sufficiently to make some joking remark about Jake's red necktie, which the dwarf, contrary to custom, took altogether in good part.

"You saw the lawyer, eh?" asked Jake, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, ridin' like the deuce down ther mule-path. When he saw us he turned an' rode back, an' I s'pose thar's quite er crowd a-guardin' ther dug-out. Wal, we'll give 'em all ther fight they want."

"What are we going to do?"

"Go back thar, an' pepper 'em through ther loopholes," answered Vorce, grimly. "Come on, Secrecy. Jake, are yer heeled?"

"No."

"Wal, take this hyar pistol. I hev another one, an' I kin git more in ther dug-out."

"Vorce," interrupted Secrecy. "We do not need Jake with us, and I want him to go back to the shanty for me. He can take the horse I rode. He'll find him where we left him, I s'pose."

"Yes."

Vorce would evidently have preferred that Jake should go into the dug-out with them, but he did not press the point.

Old Secrecy took the dwarf a little aside, and whispered some directions to him, of which Vorce overheard the words "Belle," "safe," and "laboratory," and thus guessed the nature of the whole mission.

It was the work of but a few minutes, when Jake had departed, for Vorce and the old man to make their way into the dug-out through the trap.

The first movement of Vorce indicated that he had not been without forethought in arranging the dug-out for possible defense.

The little closet, which Death-Grip and his companions had pronounced entirely empty, was really the receptacle for all the weapons that the desperado kept in readiness for emergencies.

He soon supplied himself with a pistol, and, handing a rifle to Old Secrecy, reconnoitered through a loophole, to inform himself of the doings of the enemy.

Quick as a flash he put his rifle to a hole, and taking sight through another, blazed away.

This was the shot that resulted in a slight flesh-wound for Death-Grip, as already narrated.

"By grasbu's, I hit that thar feller, sure," snarled Vorce. "An' now I s'pose we must look out fer trouble. Thet thar Death-Grip is a mean, or'nary cuss!"

Old Secrecy was examining his rifle by the light that came through the opening in the roof, and did not trouble himself to reply to his companion's observation. Perhaps if he had not been so preoccupied, as well as thoroughly fatigued, he would have disagreed with Mr. Vorce's estimate of the young detective's character.

Newton Vorce kept his eye to the loophole for a minute, but could see nothing of the detective or his companions.

Then there rose four puffs of white smoke from outside the dug-out, and four bullets rattled against the heavy oaken door of the closet.

"Wal, durn their picters!" ejaculated Vorce, as he put the muzzle of his rifle to the loophole and fired at random. "This thing is er-gettin' ter close quarters, Secrecy. Git out yer gun an' give 'em one fer luck."

Old Secrecy, apparently not caring what he did, fired a shot through the loophole, with no other effect, however, than adding some more smoke to the already suffocating atmosphere of the closet, and nearly deafening Vorce and himself with the noise.

"Guess we'd better close that trap and fasten it down," said Vorce. "I know that thar tenderfoot. He hez more git-up in him than yer generally find in fellers from ther East."

"Halloa, in there!"

The hail was in the voice of Quick.

For answer Vorce fired another shot from his rifle through the loophole.

"Say, my diminutive friend, when I get you out of that place I'll comb your red hair to some purpose. Do you hear me? It will be all the worse for you when I do get you in a courtroom. Mark that, my young friend."

"He thinks ez Jake is in hyar yet," chuckled Vorce.

"It's of no use trying to do anything now, Mr. Quick," they heard Death-Grip say. "In some way or other Jake has got hold of weapons and he can hold the fort behind that door for everlasting, if he sees fit."

"If I could only get some information about Grant Ormsby, I should not care. I wonder if that fellow would parley with me. You tell me that he is devoted to the old man."

"Listen!" whispered Old Secrecy, excitedly, to Newton Vorce. "He wants me. I feel somehow that it means good news for me."

"Don't be er fool, Secrecy. Can't yer see he wants ter git yer to go out so that they can snake yer? It's jist er trick, thet's all," growled Vorce.

"But they think Jake is in here."

"Do they? I don't feel so sure erbout thet. It looks ter me er pretty slick scheme ter git us out. But wait a while an' we'll see."

The party now went outside the dug-out and closed up the entrance, so that Vorce could not see whether they went away or not.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still no sign from the outside.

"Secrecy."

"Well."

"I'm going out. I believe they've gone around to hunt us ther other way."

"Yes?"

"They saw us turn off thar among ther rocks, and they'll foller our trail until it brings them—nowhar."

The desperado chuckled as he said this. He had no fear that they would discover the secret trap over their heads.

Cautiously he opened the thick door of the closet, he having the secret of its fastenings so that he could control it from either the inside or outside, and stepped toward the outer doorway. Old Secrecy followed.

Both men held their rifles at the "ready," and could have shot down anybody who had attempted to come through the entrance.

"They've blocked this hyar doorway with er big chunk uv rock. They must hev thought I couldn't move it jst ez easy ez nothin'," muttered Vorce, with a sneer.

He fetched two crowbars from the secret receptacle in the closet, and giving one to Old Secrecy, they pried the rock away, and sent it tumbling over the precipice outside with a crash.

"Thar's an end uv thet," said Vorce, triumphantly, as, with Secrecy, he stood within the shadow of the bushes that hid the doorway.

He was cautiously peering out, with his finger on the trigger of his rifle, and with his revolver hanging by the trigger-guard from his little finger, ready to be used in case a shot with the rifle should be ineffective, when the sound of breathing close to his ear made him turn quickly, and bring his rifle to his shoulder.

The next minute he dropped it, and with an expression of pleasure, threw his arms around the neck of his faithful horse, Demon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JAKE AND THE LAWYER HAVE A TUSSELE.

JAKE DRUM galloped down the mule-path after securing Old Secrecy's horse, with many conflicting thoughts playing hide-and-seek in his large and rather thick head.

Truth to tell, he had never been so shaken up in his life before as during the past twenty-four hours.

Accustomed to work quietly in Old Secrecy's blacksmith shop, either alone or with Belle Ormsby for company, he had seldom had more excitement than was involved in keeping his red necktie up to his own standard of cleanliness, save on one or two occasions when Vorce had taken him along on some marauding expedition to keep watch. Never till now, however, had the desperado trusted him to take an active part in a "job," while, as for the business done in Old Secrecy's laboratory, Jake looked upon it as quite legitimate, and had but a very vague idea that it was in contravention of law.

Now he found himself suddenly a full-fledged road-agent, with officers on his track, and the strong chance of getting a bullet in his anatomy at any moment.

"I'm going to help the governor to get out of this," he resolved, valiantly. "I'll take him and Miss Belle, and we'll give that Vorce the cold shake, as soon as I get what Mr. Ormsby wants from the shanty. He has no business to be hiding up there in the mountains with Vorce. I suppose Newt has some sort of pull on him, but we'll make him drop it, whatever it is."

Jake gave his horse another cut with his whip at this stage of his thoughts, and the fiery little mustang retaliated by nearly throwing him off, head-first.

He reached the foot of the mountain and turned sharp around the corner of a jutting rock, so that he could see across the wide open space between the mountains and the village of Silver Creek.

"Why, Jake!"

"Miss Belle!"

Jake tumbled off his horse in a heap and ran forward.

He was unfeignedly pleased to see the young girl.

"Good gracious! What's this?" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as she put up a gold eye-glass and scrutinized the dwarf.

Jake tossed his head disdainfully and turned toward Belle.

"I am going to the house, Miss Belle, on a message for Mr. Ormsby."

"My father? Then you know where he is?"

"Yes, I—"

"Well, where is he?" broke in Mrs. Smith, impatiently. "Bless the man, what do you stand there for, like a Chinese idol? Can't you speak?"

Jake looked from Belle to Susie Vorce, who sat quietly on her horse, enjoying the astonishment of the little man at Mrs. Smith's bullying manner.

"Well," continued the white-haired lady, sitting bolt upright in her saddle and still transfixing poor Jake with her eye-glass, "where is Mr. Ormsby?"

Jake ignored Mrs. Smith, and looking at Belle, said:

"He is at Newt Vorce's dug-out, and he has sent me to the house for some things, which I am to take back to him either there or on the mountain-path this side, according to circumstances."

"What circumstances?" snapped Mrs. Smith.

"You see, Miss Belle," continued Jake, answering the white-haired lady's question, but addressing himself to the girl, "there is a crowd after Newt Vorce, and Mr. Ormsby seems to be mixed up in it somehow. I expect they are both in the dug-out."

"Let us go on," said Mrs. Smith. "This fool is telling the truth, I suppose, though why Grant Ormsby should be compelled to hide himself in a hole (for I suppose a dug-out is nothing else), I cannot make out."

"Never mind, Jake," whispered Belle. "She is a very nice lady when you know her."

"I don't want to know her," he grumbled.

"Oh, yes you do. She is my aunt, and she is going to make papa and I happy for the rest of our lives. She has a sharp way of speaking, but she is very nice."

"Is she?"

Jake shook his head doubtfully, and Mrs. Smith at once ordered him to stop moving all that red hair backward and forward, because it was making her seasick.

"Jake, couldn't you go with us, and show us the way to the place where you were to meet papa?"

"At the dug-out?"

"No; I know where that is," answered the girl, with a shudder. "But you were to meet him on the wagon-road up the mountain, you said."

"If he could get there," acquiesced Jake, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"See here," put in Susie Vorce, who had been a silent listener hitherto, "if Jake goes with us, it will make our party stronger in case we meet with interference of any kind. The boys are after that rascally brother of mine, and I expect he knows by this time that I directed them to him. He will shoot me on sight, I know."

Belle shuddered and Mrs. Smith dropped her gold eye-glasses with a start.

"Yes," Susie went on, calmly, "I know Newton Vorce, and he will not spare me, if he gets the drop on me. But I don't mean to let him get it if I can help it. I will shoot him first."

Susie flourished an ivory-handled revolver, as she spoke, and Mrs. Smith made a cut at it with her riding-whip.

"Put that thing down. Those pop-guns are always going off at the wrong time. I shall be glad to get out of this country. It is unpleasantly warm."

She fanned herself with her handkerchief, and Susie laughed as she returned her six-shooter to her belt.

"Jake, will you go with us?"

It was Belle who asked, and Jake, who had only been waiting for some expression from the young girl, acquiesced at once.

He mounted his horse, and without another word, rode back over the way he had come, leading the three women.

"I wish I had Daisy," said Belle. "I always feel safe when on her back."

"Daisy is in the dug-out, Miss Belle, and you shall have her before sunset," promised Jake, looking back with his big mouth distended still more with a smile.

"Daisy is a horse, I suppose?" snapped Mrs. Smith.

"No, it isn't!" answered Jake shortly.

"It ain't? Then what is it?"

"A mare."

Jake's triumphant grin seemed to irritate the strange lady almost unbearably, and the dwarf took care to keep out of reach of her riding-whip for the next five minutes.

Up the mule-path leading to Vorce's dug-out did Jake Drum lead the way. He kept a sharp lookout for Death-Grip and his party, and was prepared to hide himself behind Miss Belle or Susie in case he met them. He was aware that he did not stand in very good odor with the young detective, and he did not feel at all certain that he would find himself in jail if again made a prisoner.

"Where is Yank Storey, I wonder?" remarked Susie. "He should have got here before this. If we could find him he might help us."

"Perhaps he has missed the place. It is not so easy to find unless you know the signs."

"That's true, Jake. Well, there will be no trouble about you and I finding it, I suppose."

Jake was riding ahead and had nearly reached the jutting rock referred to so often, when he turned his horse, at the imminent risk of going over the bluff, and dashed back into the group of women.

"Bless the man! What's the matter with him? He's more like a monkey than anything else," cried Mrs. Smith. "He'll have us all over the precipice in a moment!"

But Jake did not stop to explain himself. He passed them, and evidently meant to ride down the mountain back to Silver Creek itself, if necessary to escape something he had seen that filled him with dismay.

Susie Vorce, a perfect horsewoman, made her horse curvet and caught Jake's bridle, swinging him around and bringing him to a sudden halt.

"Stop!" she commanded, sternly.

The command was superfluous, for she had brought Jake's horse around so effectually that he evidently had no intention of going on.

"He's there," whispered Jake.

"Who is there?"

"That lawyer, who has been chasing me around all night. He's as slippery as a coyote, and I believe he is the devil's own cousin."

"What lawyer? Who? Mr. Quick?" asked Mrs. Smith eagerly.

"Yes, I believe his name is Quick."

"Where is he? Where is he?"

The white-haired lady galloped forward as she spoke, and glanced up the rift in the mountain wall where Jake had evidently seen his enemy.

"Where is he? Quick!"

"Present, madam, and very much at your service!" answered the lawyer's voice.

Mr. Quick rode out to the mule-path, and taking off his white hat with the black band, bowed so low, that his bald head shone in the sun like a whitewashed cobblestone.

He was closely followed by Death-Grip, Bob Brace and Jack Noble, who all removed their hats and bowed to the ladies.

"Mr. Quick, where have you been?"

The white-haired lady spoke reproachfully, and the lawyer mopped his bald head vigorously with his handkerchief.

"I have been trying to find the people for whom Quick & Slamm have been hunting for a month past."

"Have you found them?"

"I have one of them hidden in a hole in the mountain up here."

"Which one?"

"Grant Ormsby."

"Umph! And the young lady?"

"She is at her home in Silver Creek, I understand. I am going for her as soon as I get her father safe."

"You need not trouble yourself about her."

"Why not?"

"She is here!" triumphantly.

"Well, I'll be—"

"Never mind about using profane language, Mr. Quick. This is Miss Belle, my niece, and she, with this good lady, are here to help me find Grant Ormsby."

"Why didn't you stay at the hotel where I left you, Miss Ormsby? I know that you are likely to do anything when you take the notion, or I should perhaps be surprised at meeting you here. But, as it is—"

"As it is," she interrupted, "you know that I have a predilection for attending to my own business, even when I have a lawyer working for me, and, hence, here I am."

"You're a wonderful woman," muttered the lawyer to himself, "and if you had turned your attention to the law, I would have backed you against Belva Lockwood herself."

Mr. Quick had not noticed Jake Drum hitherto, but now he caught sight of that trembling individual, and with a yell of triumph, urged his horse toward the dwarf.

"Mr. Drum, I believe. Delighted to meet you again. How do you do?"

He seized the little man's hand and gave it a pull that nearly unhorsed him. Jake retaliated with a blow in the lawyer's chest that made him gasp.

"Jake!" cried Belle warningly.

"Mr. Quick!" from the white-haired lady.

Death-Grip and his companions laughed heartily as the lawyer, grasping Jake Drum around the neck, pulled him out of the saddle, and tumbled with him in a struggling, yelling heap, to the ground.

Both the lawyer and Jake felt that the time had now come when they must settle the question of personal supremacy once and forever.

Forgetting entirely the more important business that each had on hand, they devoted all their immediate energies to pummeling each other as hard and as much as they could.

A cloud of dust was soon all that could be seen of them as they rolled about on the ground, hammering, kicking, and biting at each other as fiercely as two bulldogs, mules and prize-fighters combined.

"They'll kill each other," cried Belle.

"Let 'em," said Mrs. Smith, grimly.

"Go for him!" encouraged Susie, but no one knew which side she favored, and probably she did not know herself.

The three men dismounted and dodged around the combatants, but could not see much of the battle for the dust and commotion.

The battle was too fierce to last long, and in less than two minutes the warriors desisted by mutual consent. Standing up and facing each other, they felt themselves all over to try and discover the extent of their injuries.

The lawyer presented the worst appearance. The dwarf had managed to deal him a tremendous blow on the nose and another on the left eye, besides scratching him up generally. He wiped the blood from his face, and pulling up a big stone, applied it to his bruised eye in the hope of reducing the swelling.

Jake's face was so covered with dust that it was difficult to see whether it was bruised or not, but he was certainly out of breath, and equally certainly, he was in agony over the disarrangement of his red necktie and his disheveled appearance in general.

"Now, which licked?" asked Bob Brace, with a loud guffaw.

Both of the late combatants ignored this question, and then the lawyer, holding out his hand to Jake, said, in a condescending manner:

"You're a tough little fellow, and you have given me the hardest tussle I have had since I left Chicago. I forgive you for all that you have done to me personally. If you have any controversy with the law, why, that is your own business. Shake hands."

Jake took the hand tendered him, and these two doughty champions were at last friends—for the present.

CHAPTER XXIX.

QUICK MEETS OLD SECRECY, HEAD-FIRST.

"Now, where is Grant Ormsby? That is the question," observed Quick, as he continued to hold the stone to his eye, with occasional stoppages to wipe his still bleeding nose.

"Mr. Quick, if I was a man, and if I had been up in these mountains within reach of Mr. Ormsby, as you have, I don't think I should have to ask that question. You say he is in a hole in the mountains. Where is that hole?"

The white-haired lady spoke sharply, transfixing Silas Quick with her gold eye-glasses as she did so, and the lawyer wilted visibly.

"I know he is there, but I don't know exactly how we are to get at him," he answered humbly.

"He is with Newton Vorce, you see, madam," put in Death-Grip.

"My rascally brother," added Susie. "Well, the best way to deal with him is to shoot him out."

"Is my father with Vorce?" asked Belle, sadly. "That man seems to be the shadow of our lives."

"It shall soon be dispelled, trust me, Miss Belle," said Death-Grip.

"I do trust you."

She put her hand in his, and he bent over it as if he would have kissed it. The girl, with a woman's quick observation, saw that the others were looking at them curiously, and drew her hand gently away.

"Well, well. We cannot stay here all day," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, impatiently. "Lead on, somebody."

"Is everybody armed?" asked the young detective. "Newt Vorce is a dangerous man, and we may have trouble. I should suggest that the ladies stay here or go back toward the village while we smoke Mr. Vorce out of his den."

"What?" screamed Mrs. Smith. "Go back? It is a good thing for you, Mr. Quick, that you did not suggest such a ridiculous thing. This young man does not know me, or he would never have hinted at my withdrawing when I had made up my mind to do anything."

She looked so savagely at Mr. Quick that that unhappy gentleman felt constrained to remind her that he had not hinted at it.

"I'm glad of it, Mr. Quick—glad of it."

The detective quietly questioned each person present, and found that all had revolvers and could use them, even Mrs. Smith handling her weapon with the ease of a veteran.

"Most extraordinary woman!" was Lawyer Quick's admiring comment, *sotto voce*.

"You are all determined to come, then?" asked Death-Grip, looking around once more at the three women.

"Lead on, young man, and do not ask any more absurd questions," replied Mrs. Smith, and Susie Vorce nodded her head in acquiescence.

As for Belle there was a set look of determination on her pretty face that the young man knew meant going forward to the death, if needs were.

A council of war was now held.

"We have just left the front of the dug-out, and it is evident that Vorce has got inside somehow, and is moreover well armed. We left our young friend here, Jake Drum, secure, as we supposed, in a sort of cell in the dug-out, but when a number of shots were fired at us from this door I felt convinced that Vorce had got there somehow."

"Yes. Well?" observed Mrs. Smith.

"When I saw Drum with you it did not surprise me so very much, because I argued that if Vorce could get in, there was nothing to prevent Jake getting out."

"Exactly. But Grant Ormsby?"

"Old Secrecy? Yes, he was with Vorce before, I know, and of course he is with him now."

"Not necessarily, my young friend. When you have practiced at the bar as long as I have, you will know that there is nothing so dangerous from a legal point of view, as circumstantial evidence," said Silas Quick.

"Mr. Quick, you say some of silliest things for a smart man, that I ever heard," observed Mrs. Smith, quietly. "Of course, Grant Ormsby is with this man Vorce. You said yourself that you knew where Mr. Ormsby was, in the mountains, and now you are beating about the bush, with your idiotic doubts, that seem by the way, to be the very foundation of legal theories."

This unexpected attack from the white-haired lady staggered Silas Quick, and he did not venture to express any more opinions, legal or otherwise.

"There is no doubt that your father is with Newt Vorce, Miss Belle, and we have every reason to suppose that they are both in the dug-out," observed the detective.

"If you had asked me, I could have told you at first," said Jake. "I left them both on their way, by a back door, and if there was any firing from the inside door, it is proof that they are there."

"Can you take us to that back door, young man?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No. If it will do any harm to Mr. Ormsby, I would not do it for a million dollars."

The little man evidently meant what he said, and Mrs. Smith nodded approvingly.

"It's for the benefit of Mr. Ormsby," she declared, quietly. "You can be sure of that."

He looked inquiringly at Belle, who showed by a look that she agreed with the strange lady, and Jake did not hesitate any longer.

"This way," he said, briefly.

Up the rift in the rock a little way and then it was found that the horses could not go any further with comfort.

All dismounted and began to scramble over the rocks, with Jake first, Death-Grip and the lawyer close behind him, then the ladies, and Bob Brace and Noble covering the rear.

They came to a narrow path, with the usual high wall on one side and a breastwork of loose boulders on the other. It was the spot where Jake Drum had encountered Vorce and Old Secrecy when the dwarf escaped from the dug-out by means of the trap-door.

Jake crawled up on the loose stones and looked over.

It was evident that no one was there save their own party, and he walked rapidly onward, making his way to the defile below.

When the others joined him he stopped and whispered.

"We are very close to the place now, so don't make any noise."

"Why not? What do we care whether they

hear us or not?" demanded Mrs. Smith, with some asperity, but in a low tone of voice.

"Only this. That Vorce is a dead shot, and if he saw me coming along this place with a party he would say that I had given him away, an' draw a bead on me in an instant."

"Ah!"

"You see, we should be helpless here. He would only have to raise himself to the trap-door where he would be covered by a big stone. Then he could blaze away along this gorge, and cut us down like so many spring chickens."

"Pleasant, indeed," observed Quick. "A clear case of assault with intent to kill."

"Hush!" whispered Jake.

This peremptory style of shutting off the lawyer would doubtless have caused trouble an hour sooner. As it was Mr. Quick put his hand to his bruised eye and said nothing. Jake Drum had given him a lesson.

Cautiously they crept along, until the dwarf stopped and held up a warning finger.

"What's the matter now?"

The white-haired lady had her revolver in her hand ready for action, and as she asked this question she flourished it in a way that made everybody dodge.

"Here's the place," whispered Jake.

He stooped down and began scraping away some earth that lay loosely on a small plateau in the middle of the gorge, revealing a flat, square stone some three feet each way.

"Fastened inside," he muttered.

"Well?" from Death-Grip.

"Can't get it up."

"What shall we do?"

"Why don't you speak to them through the stone? I suppose they could hear you," whispered Susie.

"Well?"

"Tell them to lift the stone."

"Well?"

"Make them believe you are alone."

"Yes?"

"Well, it will be easy enough to arrange matters after that, Jake," put in Death-Grip, good-humoredly.

"I don't like it," objected the dwarf. "I have no love for Newton Vorce, but I don't like to play dirt on any man, however mean he may be."

"Young man, you must overcome your scruples in the interest of justice," admonished Quick.

Jake did not reply to this last speech, but drawing his bowie-knife, hammered with the handle on the stone, the others standing around him in a circle and watching him in silent eagerness.

There was no reply to the first hammering, and Jake again applied the handle of his knife to the stone, and listened intently.

Then a responsive knocking was heard below.

"Hallo, Vorce," yelled Jake.

"Hallo, thar," returned the voice of the desperado, muffled and gruffer than usual, as it came up from the bowels of the earth.

"Let me come down."

"Who are you?"

"Jake—Jake Drum."

"Hey yer got back from Silver Creek already?"

"No, I want to speak to Mr. Ormsby about something, before I go."

The stone trembled and went up about an inch, but was still held from below in such a way that it could not be moved from the outside.

"Hev yer seen anything uv thet thar tenderfoot Dick Young or Death-Grip or whatever he calls himself," asked Vorce, his tones coming with startling distinctness through the little opening.

Death-Grip shook his fist warningly at Jake, and the latter after a few seconds' hesitation, answered:

"No."

"Nor thar lawyer, thet thar durned fool from Chicago?"

"No."

"Secrecy," said Vorce, speaking into the interior of the cave. "Hyar's Jake Drum, an' he says ez he wants ter speak ter yer. You'd better kum up hyar an' ask him what he wants."

There was a pause, during which the watchers outside could hear a shuffling below, as of some one climbing up with difficulty, and then Old Secrecy's voice was heard:

"Well, Jake, what do you want?"

"That you, Mr. Ormsby?"

"Yes."

"It is his voice," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, almost unable to control her excitement. "It is hardly changed. Grant!"

Death-Grip's hand over her mouth prevented the last word being delivered loudly enough for Vorce to hear, but Old Secrecy pushed the stone up a little higher, as he asked:

"What did you say, Jake?"

"Nothing. But I want you to come with me to the house if you have got through with what you had to do down there."

"I am afraid it is hardly safe, Jake. I have enemies, Jake—enemies, and they are on my track—on my track, Jake."

The old man spoke hurriedly, and Jake knew

that he was in one of his most miserable moods, with his mind wandering more than usual.

"But you have friends, Mr. Ormsby, more friends than you think, perhaps."

"Good!" exclaimed the lawyer to himself. "The fellow has some sense, after all, in spite of his merry-andrew dress."

"Ob, what are yer chinning about thar, Secrecy?" interrupted Vorce, with a growl. "Open thar trap and let him come down hyar. He might be useful."

A little more scuffling, and then the trap-door was pushed up with a jerk.

Jake started back suddenly, upsetting the lawyer who stood just behind him.

Quick clawed at the air for a moment, staggered, and then, with a howl, went head-first down the hole between Vorce and Old Secrecy.

Crash went the flat stone as it fell into its place, and the lawyer was a prisoner in Newt Vorce's dug-out. But—he had found Grant Ormsby.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRAPPED.

OLD Secrecy and Newt Vorce both grasped at the lawyer involuntarily as he made his unceremonious entry, and to this alone could Silas Quick attribute the fact that he was not killed instantly. His fall was broken, and instead of alighting on the top of his head, he came down safely, but with a heavy jar, in a sitting posture.

"Fasten that trap, quick, Secrecy," yelled Vorce, and as the old man obeyed, the desperado let himself down to the floor and sprung upon Quick.

"Hands up!"

Involuntarily the disgruntled lawyer did as he was told, and Vorce, with the cold muzzle of his revolver pressed against the other's forehead, took away his knife. His revolver had fallen to the ground when its owner took his headlong dive.

There was plenty of light in the small closet in which the three men sat staring at each other. Vorce considered the dug-out his headquarters, and had everything prepared for a long siege, which he knew might come at any time. A coal-oil lamp, with a reflector, made the place brilliant, and the lawyer saw that there was a capacious store-room, burrowed deep into the rocks, and generally concealed by a door made to resemble the walls around it, in which were food supplies, in the way of canned meats, crackers, etc., sufficient to feed two or three men for many months.

"Now, young feller, what are yer after?" asked Vorce, as he seated himself on a trunk that he had dragged from the storeroom, and looked into the lawyer's face.

Silas Quick drew out his handkerchief and wiped his bald head significantly.

"Young feller, eh? That is libel. I am 53 years of age, and though I am not an old man, I must file an objection to being addressed as 'young feller.' Too much familiarity breeds contempt of court. Or, as we say in the Latin—"

"Don't yer do it," interrupted Vorce, with a threatening flourish of his revolver. "Plain old United States is what we want hyar. What were yer doing up thar when yer came a-tumblin' inter a gentleman's private parlor?"

But Silas Quick had lost all interest in Vorce's questioning. He was gazing intently into the face of Old Secrecy, who was sitting by the side of the desperado on the trunk, apparently in a deep reverie.

"Grant Ormsby," said the lawyer, suddenly. Old Secrecy looked up.

"Who are you?"

"I am Silas Quick, Esq., of the firm of Quick & Slamm, attorneys-at-law, Chicago, Illinois. I am retained by Miss Eugenia Ormsby, administrator of the estate of Robert Ormsby, Esq., deceased, late of Chicago, Illinois."

"Robert Ormsby?"

"Yes, sir. Robert Ormsby, father of Grant and Eugenia Ormsby, the latter of Chicago, Illinois, and Grant now supposed to be in Colorado."

"What's all this hyar wind about?" interrupted Vorce, savagely. "Don't you know, Secrecy, that we are in er tight fix down hyar, an' that we'll hev er circus afore we get out? We can't afford ter listen ter this durned fool."

"Silence!" cried Quick.

"What's thet?"

Vorce arose and was about to seize the attorney by the throat, but Old Secrecy stepped between them and looked appealingly at the desperado.

"Wal, it's all right, Secrecy, but I won't allow no one ter tell me to shet up in my own ranch," grumbled Vorce, as he resumed his seat.

"I beg the gentleman's pardon. My request for silence was merely the result of habit," said the lawyer, with a comical twinkle in his turned eye.

"What do you want with me? You seem to know all about my family affairs," said Old Secrecy.

"I do. That is why I am here. My business in Colorado is to tell you that, after many years of litigation, the validity of the will which makes you a rich man, and your daughter Belle one of the wealthiest heiresses in the West, has been established, and I want you to go back with your sister and me to Chicago without delay."

"My sister? Where is she?"

"She is— Well, I don't know exactly where she is at present. She is a most remarkable woman."

"Wal, before yer talk about goin' back ter Chicago, how are yer goin' to git out uv this, Secrecy?" sneered the desperado.

"There is nothing to prevent Grant Ormsby walking out forthwith," declared Quick.

"Except that I won't low no one ter leave this hyar place till I go."

Vorce had taken his stand with his back to the thick oaken door leading to the outer room, and pistol in hand, stood ready to dispute any attempt to pass him.

"Vorce is right, I must stand by him," said Old Secrecy, feebly.

"Uml! Well, you know best, but I think this matter had better be settled amicably, if possible. You see, Mr. Vorce, there is a large force of people who are determined that you shall be got out of here, and who are prepared to use force with deadly weapons, if necessary."

"Oh, they are? Wal, I hev deadly weapons, too, an' mebbe I kin use 'em."

"Exactly! But you'll have to give in at last, and I should think that a graceful surrender would be better for all parties," answered the lawyer, soothingly.

Crash!

A tremendous blow that might have been delivered with a sledge-hammer, resounded on the flat stone that covered the trap over their heads.

Vorce's brow grew black as night. Then he laughed derisively.

"Ah, let 'em hammer. They'll never break that thar stone. It's too well fixed. See."

Silas Quick looked up and saw that the stone was clamped with heavy steel bands that crossed and recrossed, and were bolted with the stone at the edges.

"Even if they were to split thar stone, it wouldn't do no good. Thar steel bands 'u'd hold it together if thar whole stone wuz in splinters."

Another crash and another!

"They must all be up thar," said Vorce. "I wish I could git just one shot at 'em."

Quick was watching Vorce closely. A thought had flashed through his brain.

If only he could capture the desperado himself, what a feather in his cap it would be.

As we have seen, the lawyer was by no means deficient in courage. The only thing was to hit upon some plan offering a reasonable hope of success.

"Say, lawyer, I want you ter tell me who you left in thet thar party. D'ye hear me?"

Vorce pointed his pistol at the lawyer's head, and Quick noticed that the nervous finger on the trigger twitched as if eager to send the bullet to his brain.

"There are several people up there."

"Tell me who they are, an' stop foolin', or I'll send yer ter blazes, ez sure ez you're a lawyer," growled the desperado. "Is thet tenderfoot Dick Young with 'em?"

"I don't know. There is a young man they call Death-Grip."

"Thet's thar feller!"

"And there are some women?"

"Yes, an' that cursed Jake Drum. I suppose he's gone back on me an' Old Secrecy?"

In spite of Vorce's bravado, the lawyer detected a ring of anxiety in the tones with which he asked this question.

"No. He came to the trap to speak to you because he was taken prisoner, and was compelled to ask you to raise the trap-door."

This was not the truth, but the lawyer had half conceived a plan for getting Vorce into his power, and this was the first move. If he could make the desperado believe that Drum would help him in extremity, it would render his capture all the easier.

"Humph!"

Vorce was thinking, while the banging upon the stone above his head continued vigorously.

The lawyer had moved over to the door, and, with his back to it, was feeling cautiously for the fastenings. Old Secrecy sat on the trunk, pistol in hand, in his usual apathetic condition. It was only when aroused to action that he became the sensible, brave man we have seen him to be sometimes.

"Secrecy," said Vorce.

"Yes."

"Come hyar."

The old man stepped to his side.

"We hev ter move right smart. Them fellers are bangin' over our heads. Thet shows thet it's safe ter go out thar other way."

Old Secrecy nodded.

"Ther best thing ez we kin do is ter take what stuff we kin carry easily, an' git out. D'ye think ez yer kin git ter yer safe at thar shanty, or will yer let it go?"

"I must do so, I suppose," said Old Secrecy, carelessly.

The two men were speaking in low tones, which, under cover of the noise above, made it impossible for Quick to overhear their conversation. He was still fumbling at the bolts of the door, and had just found a spring which controlled all the fastenings at once.

Vorce whispered something more to the old man, and the latter, with a weary air, as if obeying a command in which he had no special interest, leveled a revolver at Silas Quick, and stood facing him.

Then the desperado disappeared into the storeroom.

"Oho!" muttered the lawyer. "He has left the old man to guard me while he has gone to collect his plunder ready to depart. Now is my time."

He looked earnestly into the face of Old Secrecy, but could not get any responsive glance from him.

"Pretty well gone, I'm afraid," he muttered. Then aloud: "Grant Ormsby."

Old Secrecy started, but kept his pistol pointed directly at Quick's forehead.

"Grant Ormsby," repeated Silas.

"That is my name—or, at least it was."

"It was? It is," returned the lawyer, cheerfully. "If you would only wake up a little you would see that there are bright times ahead for you."

Old Secrecy shook his head sadly.

"Yes, there are, I tell you. I'm afraid you have got yourself into rather serious trouble, and there may be some difficulty in adjusting your past record with the law, but I can do it. I have not been practicing as an attorney for thirty years without learning how to make a good line of defense in such a case as yours."

Old Secrecy, still with his pistol poised mechanically, was evidently wool-gathering again, and hardly followed Mr. Quick's remarks.

The hammering overhead had stopped, and a slight rustling, as Vorce moved about in the depths of the storeroom, could be faintly distinguished.

"Now, Grant Ormsby, I want you to attend to me. You have nothing further in common with this fellow, Vorce. I have no doubt that you have been mixed up with him in some way, but it is quite evident to any man with a legal mind that he has kept you in his power by some terrorism of a criminal character. Very well, then. Now, let us look at the case from a common sense point of view."

Mr. Quick was enjoying himself very much now, under the impression that he was making a remarkably lucid argument. He laid the forefinger of his right hand upon that of his left, in the way he was accustomed to do in court in Chicago, and put on his most forensic air as he proceeded:

"You, Grant Ormsby, are now a rich man, and have the means to become a respected citizen of Chicago, or any other center of civilization. It is your duty—a duty you owe to society, to yourself, and to your daughter—"

"Belle, my Belle!" murmured Old Secrecy, as for the first time he allowed the hand holding the revolver to drop to his side.

Mr. Quick noted the effect the mention of Belle had produced, and strongly approved of the fact that he was no longer covered by that wicked-looking six-shooter.

"Now, Grant Ormsby, here is my plan. Will you follow me?"

"Follow you? What do you mean? Newton Vorce is my partner, and I—"

"Grant Ormsby," whispered the lawyer, impressively, as he bent forward to look closely into Old Secrecy's eyes, "Belle Ormsby is your daughter."

"True, Belle—Belle! And yet, Vorce—"

"Can you hesitate between the two?"

"Secrecy," called Vorce from the store-room.

"Now, Grant Ormsby, decide quickly. There is no time to be lost," exclaimed the lawyer, earnestly.

He touched the spring on the oaken door. It flew open. Old Secrecy looked doubtfully around him. He evidently desired to follow the lawyer but was held back by some secret fear.

"Come, Grant Ormsby—for liberty, wealth, and—Belle!" whispered Quick.

He seized the old man by the arm as he spoke, and dragged him through the doorway into the outer room of the dug-out.

Then, with a shout of triumph that he could not repress, he slammed the oaken door shut with a crash, and pulled Old Secrecy through the other entrance to the mule-path outside, just as two sharp cracks were followed by as many bullets from Newton Vorce's Winchester through the loopholes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

VORCE DRIVEN TO BAY.

"HALLOA, there, Secrecy! Hold on! What are yer going?"

Old Secrecy and Mr. Quick were thus hailed as soon as they reached the outer air, bewildered somewhat by the shots from Vorce's rifle and

the hurried manner in which they had left the dug-out.

The lawyer recovered himself first, and looking in the direction of the voices, uttered a little cry of recognition.

"Why, it's that rascally stage-driver, who got drunk and had to be left in Silver Creek."

"Yank Storey," added Old Secrecy.

"That's jist who it is, you kin bet yer outfit!" responded Yank Storey, as that worthy, with the cowboy who had volunteered to assist in the capture of Newton Vorce, came riding down the path toward them.

"What are you doing here? I thought you were sick in bed," said the lawyer.

"I wuz, but I'm better now," returned Yank, with a grin. "Yer see, thar's er sort uv expedition to fix this hyar Vorce fer er little matter of horse-stealing. We thought ez we hed him down in ther village, but he managed ter slip away. So then we follered him up hyar, an' we've been hunting his hole fer the last four hours. Now, I s'pose we've found it, an' Old Secrecy too."

"Old Secrecy, as you call him, is all right," observed the lawyer coldly. "I'll take care of him. He has been forced by this man, Newton Vorce, to assume a false position, but I am here to set him right before the world, and I will prove to all of you that he is a good citizen and a credit to the community."

"That's all right. We ain't got nothing ag'in' Old Secrecy. But this hyar Newt Vorce hez got ter leave ther country by ther rope route, now I tell yer."

"Yes, yes, that is all very well. But the man is in this cave of his, and the next thing is to get him out. We can do it, because he is alone, and we have all the men in the country to help us," said the lawyer briskly. "Grant Ormsby, you must direct operations. Has he any other means of getting out besides this doorway and the trap by which I went in?"

"No."

"Good. Now, I think the best plan will be for you three to stay here, while I make my way around to the place where the other party is hanging away at the stone trap-door. Friend Storey, will you lend me your horse?"

"Certainly."

"On second thoughts, no. I could use it only on the mule-path here, and I can walk that distance. But if you have two revolvers you might lend me one."

Without a word, the cowboy with Storey—a very reticent individual, who rarely spoke when sober, though he was a most tiresome talker when drunk—produced a six-shooter and handed it to Silas.

"Now, you three stand at the side of the entrance, and if Vorce comes out, shoot him."

The lawyer gave this direction with a cheerful air of bustle, and then cantered down the path with more activity than might have been expected of a man of his rotundity.

He reached the jutting rock on the path, and turning into the narrow gorge just beyond it, scrambled up the rough path until he could look over the rocks at the place where the trap-door was concealed.

"Mr. Quick," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as that lady arose from what appeared to be a very comfortable seat on an adjacent rock.

"Yours obediently, madam. I have just left my friend, Mr. Vorce, who is in dignified retirement, or, as we say in the Latin, *otium cum dig*—"

"Mr. Quick, don't be a fool."

"Madam, I will not. I was merely about to say that, in company with your brother, Grant Ormsby, I managed to get out of an unpleasant predicament, and that we have Newton Vorce a prisoner in his own den."

"Grant Ormsby is with you? Where is he?" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, hastily.

"My father!" cried Belle.

"Quite safe, my dear young lady. But now to business."

In a few words the lawyer told his adventures to the party, and then Death-Grip, turning to Bob Brace and Jack Noble, said:

"We may have trouble to get this man out, but we can do it by using prompt and fearless measures. I am a detective, and I am in Colorado for the express purpose of arresting this man—alive, if possible; dead, if I must. Help me to catch him alive, and it will be one hundred dollars apiece for you."

"We'd help you anyhow, Dick. But uv course a hundred dollars is all right, too," said Jack Noble.

"I don't care er durn 'bout ther hundred dollars, but I'd like ter git some uv my horses back," declared Brace.

Jake Drum had stood by the side of Belle Ormsby, silent but observant. The lawyer now noticed him for the first time, and offering him his hand, asked him how he felt.

"I feel very well, sir. How is your eye?"

The question was put in the demure fashion that the dwarf knew so well how to assume. Quick looked sharply at him, as if to detect any hidden satire, but Jake's face was as inexpressive as that of a sphinx, and the lawyer was bound to take the query in good faith.

"My eye is very comfortable, thank you, sir,

but I feel the need of a hat. My head is not so well fortified by nature as yours, sir."

Jake fired up for a second or two, but looking at the lawyer's bald crown, he confessed to himself that it was better to have red hair than none at all, and his smoldering anger cooled down forthwith.

"Bob, I think that if you and Jack will guard this trap, the rest of us had better go around to the front of the dug-out. He will probably come out that way," said Death Grip. "Miss Belle, you can do no good here, and I should advise you to go with Susie and this other lady down the mountain until we can get this man out."

"Young man, I will stay with the party until you get this horse-thief secured."

"So will I, Mrs. Smith," added Susie.

"And I, too, auntie," declared Belle.

"Just what I expected," muttered the detective. "Three brave women, all good, and yet of three entirely different types."

The lawyer had dropped upon the flat stone over the entrance to the dug-out, and was examining it curiously.

Suddenly he shot up into the air, and fell in a heap over Jake Drum, who was standing just behind him.

There was a rattle of revolvers, with the loud crack, crack of a Winchester, and Death-Grip felt a stinging sensation in the arm, receiving for the second time a trifling wound at the hands of Newton Vorce.

"Throw that rock down the hole," yelled Brace, excitedly, as he fired shot after shot into the opening made by the sudden raising of the trap-door which had been the reason of upsetting the lawyer.

Mrs. Smith, without hesitation, picked up a boulder about as large as her own head, and tumbled it down the hole.

An oath from Vorce, and then the trap was closed again with a crash, the stone being as immovable as before.

"Pull it up! Pull it up! Five hundred dollars to the man that captures him," shouted Death-Grip, excitedly, disregarding the stream of blood that was pouring down his sleeve from his wounded arm.

Jake Drum bent down, and seizing the edge of the stone in a particular way, moved it upward an inch or two.

"Help me here, and we can get it up," he cried. "He hasn't had time to fasten it."

Death-Grip, Brace and Noble, all put their hands to the stone and exerted all their strength to raise it higher. There was, evidently, some one pulling with all his force inside. Of course that some one was Newton Vorce.

Silas Quick lay in a heap where he had been thrown. He was thoroughly disgusted with the many bruises and falls he had been receiving within the last few hours, and for the moment really did not care whether Vorce were captured or not.

"Mr. Quick," cried Mrs. Smith, severely.

"Yes, madam."

"Can you not help to raise that stone?"

"I suppose so, madam."

"Well, please do so, to oblige me."

"Very well, madam."

With a very bad grace, he put his hand to the stone. There was a vigorous concerted effort and—up came the stone.

All jumped back, to get out of range of the desperado's rifle, but the expected shots did not come.

The stone was thrown back entirely, its steel bands glittering in the sun, and the hole, black and threatening, was fully revealed.

All were reluctant to go forward and look over, because a fair target would thus be afforded for the desperate man below.

What was to be done? Mrs. Smith answered the question. She deliberately rolled the immense stone upon which she had been sitting near to the edge of the opening, and Death-Grip, divining her purpose, hastened to assist her.

Crash! and the big stone had followed the other into the closet of Newton Vorce's dug-out.

"That ought to stir him up," observed Bob Brace.

"If it fell on his head," added Jack Noble.

"Not necessarily," was the lawyer's cynical comment.

Death-Grip did not say anything. He waited a moment, and then resolutely walked forward and gazed into the hole.

It must be confessed that his heart beat a little faster as he peered into the gloom—for Vorce had extinguished his lamp—and realized that the desperado could put a bullet through his brain with a movement of his finger, but he did not hesitate.

"There is no one here," he proclaimed, after a close scrutiny. "He has gone into the outer room."

"There are three men on the mule-path who will see that he does not go out that way," said the lawyer, coolly.

Death-Grip examined his revolver to see that it was in perfect order, loosened his bowie-knife in its sheath, and then—let himself down through the trap.

Cautiously he crept to the oaken door and peered through one of the loopholes.

Vorce was sitting by the table, his rifle in his hand, while he looked alternately at the oaken door and at the exit to the mule-path. He knew that he was between two fires, but there was no sign of surrender to be seen in the resolute face.

Death-Grip had seen enough. He climbed up to the trap-door again, and beckoned to Bob Brace and Jake Noble.

"Come down here. We must make a rush together, and I think we can catch him before he has a chance to use his rifle."

The two men let themselves down, and each took a look at the desperado through a loophole.

"Now, then, all together," whispered Death-Grip. "I will open the door."

But here he reckoned without his host. He found that the door was not to be opened easily, and he was still fumbling silently at the bolts, when a yell from Bob Brace startled him.

"Get out, Dick, quick!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look through that thar hole. He hez a dozen sticks of dynamite piled up on ther table, and he is holding a lighted match in his hand. As soon ez you bu'st open thet door he'll fire ther stuff an' blow us all ter ther sky. I know ther kind uv man he is."

CHAPTER XXXII.

VORCE AND HIS VICTIM GO TO THE SHADOWS TOGETHER.

THE three men lost no time in climbing to the surface, and, with a warning shout to Jake Drum, ran away from the trap-door, and joined the ladies, who were sitting quietly some rods away.

At a safe distance, they kept their eyes on the trap, but there was no explosion.

Then Death-Grip laughed, as he said:

"Well, we are pretty smart fellows to be frightened away by such a simple trick. Of course he wanted to frighten us. I don't suppose it was dynamite at all."

"Wal, I don't know. It looked like it, an' I don't want ter take no chances on that cussed stuff. When it does go off, it's mighty sudden in its action," observed Bob Brace, with a cautious shake of the head.

"Jake, hez he got any dynamite down thar? You ought ter know," asked Jack Noble.

"He has."

None spoke for a moment, and then Susie Vorce suggested a plan.

"Newt does not know that Jake is working against him. Does he?"

"I guess not," answered Jake, "but you cannot always tell. Vorce is a smart man, and I expect he suspects me."

"Well, you must risk that."

"What is your plan?"

"For Jake to go down that trap, get Newt into conversation, and then manage to take the dynamite out of his reach."

"Well?"

"Then you will have him in your power. He can not go out the front door because it is guarded, and if he tries to get out this way there are enough people to fill him full of holes as soon as he shows his head."

"And suppose he just stays there, and won't come out at all?"

"I'll tell you a way to make him come out," answered Susie with quiet confidence. She was the most bitter enemy now that her step-brother had.

"Jake, will you do that?" asked the detective.

The dwarf shrugged his shoulders and fingered his red necktie nervously.

"Of course the gentleman will do it. It is necessary for the preservation of this commonwealth. It may be rather an unpleasant proceeding, savoring somewhat of treachery, but the end justifies the means, or, as we say in the Latin—"

"Mr. Quick, do not be a fool."

"Certainly not, madam; I merely wished to—"

"Mr. Quick!"

The white-haired lady stamped her foot, and the attorney gazed wrathfully at Jake, as if blaming him for the snub.

"Now, Jake, there is no time to lose," said the detective.

The dwarf had evidently been having a struggle with himself, but now he shook himself, as if trying to dispel all hesitation, and said that he would go.

No time was wasted. Jake, well armed, let himself down the trap, and cried:

"Mr. Vorce."

"Wal?"

"Open this door. It is Jake Drum."

"Any ore with yer?"

"No; they have all gone. I want to speak to you, quick."

The oaken door was thrown open with a crash, and Vorce appeared in the opening, with his Winchester pointing at the dwarf's breast.

"Don't try any monkey work with me, Jake, or you'll never know what struck yer."

"I am not trying anything," answered Jake, in injured tones. "What's Mr. Ormsby?"

"Gone! Cuss him! With thet thar lawyer! Ef I could git just one crack at thet feller's bald head, I'd make it match his eye, you kin bet."

Jake was looking furtively at the table behind Vorce, while the latter was speaking. He saw that it was indeed dynamite lying there!

"Let us get into the other room while we are talking, Mr. Vorce. There's no one around, and we can get a little more air there."

The desperado, still eyeing Jake suspiciously, and keeping his rifle ready for action, walked backward into the outer apartment, and stood by the table opposite the oaken door. Jake stood with his back to the door, and his right hand resting on the table, fingering the dynamite.

How to get the stuff away and escape Vorce's deadly rifle? That was the problem.

The dwarf knew the secret of the oaken door, and was confident that he could fasten it on the inside so that it could not be opened by Vorce, if only he could get through.

"Mr. Vorce,"

"Wal?"

"I think it might be safe for you to go out the front way."

"Yer do? And why?"

"Because I don't think there is any one there to stop you. The crowd was all up at the back here. I hid myself until they went away, and then I came down. The dynamite scared them all, I guess, from what they said."

"Yes, and I'd hev fired it, too. It would hev rubbed me out, too, uv course, but I wouldn't hev cared fer thet. I'd ha' cleaned out thet thar sister uv mine, and thet tenderfoot, anyhow."

"Let us look out of the front door and see how things are," suggested Jake.

Vorce did not answer, but with his rifle poised turned around and crawled cautiously to the doorway.

This was Jake's opportunity. Swiftly and noiselessly he gathered up the sticks of dynamite, and ran into the closet, closing the outer door and securing it with an iron bar, just as Vorce saw through the ruse and fired three shots from his rifle into the heavy oak.

In another ten seconds Jake was at the top and showing the dynamite to Death-Grip.

The young detective had made up his mind what to do.

"You say that he cannot possibly get through that oaken door, Jake?"

"Not for an hour or two. He might break through in the course of time, but I doubt it."

"Don't you know that he couldn't break through in two hours?" asked Quick, adopting his cross-examination manner in its severest aspect.

"I don't know how long it would take him."

"You don't? Would it take him ten hours?"

"No, I don't think it would."

"Nine?"

"No."

"Eight, seven, six, five, four, three? Come, now, give me an intelligent and straightforward answer to my question."

"Mr. Quick!" from Mrs. Smith.

"Yes, madam!"

"You are not examining this young man on the witness-stand in a Chicago criminal court. Please remember that!"

"Humph!" And Mr. Quick subsided.

"Jake," said Death-Grip, as he put the sticks of dynamite into the dwarf's hand, "take this stuff into the hole there and pile it up against the door. Get a fuse, attach it and bring the end up here. You know where to find a fuse down there, you tell me."

"Yes."

In five minutes Death-Grip had arranged the fuse and set light to the end.

"Now, let us get around to the front except you, Jack. You stay here, and when you hear three revolver shots with time to count One—two—three! between them, jump in there and stamp out the fuse."

"Very wal; I'll do it!"

Round to the front of the dug-out went the whole party, except Noble.

"It is only a question of how long he can stand it," observed Death-Grip, quietly, while Mrs. Smith and Old Secrecy were talking and explaining past differences, and Belle was clasp- ing her father's neck.

Inside the dug-out Vorce had been attracted by the smell of the fuse to the oaken door just as Jake had escaped through the trap-door, too quickly for the desperado to use his rifle.

For half an hour—three-quarters—he watched the flame getting nearer and nearer to the explosive. In another fifteen minutes he would be blown to atoms.

"I wouldn't care if it would take them fellers with me," he growled. "Wal, er man kin only die once."

He was doggedly resolved to stay until the place was blown about his ears.

Ten minutes longer! Five!

"Newton Vorce, if you will come out with your hands up, we will not shoot," rung out the voice of Death-Grip.

Three minutes! Two minutes! One!

The desperado stepped out of the doorway with his hands above his head.

Death-Grip raised his revolver and fired the three signal-shots.

Too late!

A crash that seemed to rend the mountains from base to apex shook the ground upon which they stood, and Vorce's dug-out was a chaotic mass to which access would be impossible till dooms day.

The desperado's eyes were fixed upon Old Secrecy.

"Cuss you! You give me away, I know," he hissed.

Before any one could divine his intention his hand flew to the inside of his shirt. There was a ringing report, and Old Secrecy fell dead, with a bullet in his brain!

"Ha, ha! Old Secrecy, we will still be partners!"

Instantly he turned the muzzle of his revolver to his own mouth and fell across the body of his victim.

Belle Ormsby went to Chicago with her aunt, Eugenia Ormsby, and at once took her place as leading belle of that great city. For a year she wore the habiliments of woe in memory of the father she loved so well, and even when she cast off the outward symbols of grief, the thought of the many days they had lived almost entirely in each other's society came back to her like a softened dream with a tragic awakening.

Lawyer Quick is still practicing in Chicago. He gains more distinction every day, and it is said that he has a strong chance of reaching the Supreme Bench before long. He has ambition of another sort, however, which the gossips say is likely soon to be fulfilled, namely—to lead to the hymeneal altar the wealthy and popular Miss Eugenia Ormsby, aunt of Belle Ormsby, the heiress.

Jake Drum lives in the household of Miss Eugenia Ormsby. He has discarded his eccentric clothing, and looks like a civilized being, though he still wears a red necktie when he is dressed. His peccadilloes when he lived in the West were condoned through the offices of Silas Quick, Esq., and he now leads a most exemplary life, on a comfortable income provided by the daughter and sister of Old Secrecy.

Bob Brace and Yank Storey are talking about fighting a duel for the hand of Miss Susie Vorce, that buxom damsel having been unable so far to decide which one to marry. Rumor has it, however, that Mr. Brace is the favorite!

When the shanty of Old Secrecy at Silver Creek was searched, nothing was found to connect him with counterfeiting, and it was supposed by the few persons in the secret of his operations that all the bogus coin, dies, etc., had been taken to Vorce's dug-out and buried in the explosion. In the safe a large sum of money was found, which Belle caused to be distributed among the poor of Chicago.

Most of the horses stolen by Vorce, within a few months of his decease, were found in the secret stable under the Silver Creek Tavern in connection with Old Secrecy's shanty. It was satisfactorily proved that Miss Susie Vorce had been entirely unaware of her half-brother's shady transactions.

Mr. Quick, in the course of his professional business, some time after Grant Ormsby's death, found himself listening to the *ante-mortem* statement of a notorious burglar, who confessed, among other things, that he had killed a prominent citizen in a bar-room nearly twenty years before. Grant Ormsby, the murdered man and himself, were the only three persons in the room at the time. Ormsby was intoxicated, and the murderer easily made the former believe that he had killed the man. Ormsby, taking his baby girl, Belle, fled to the mountains of Colorado, where he fell in with Vorce, to whom he confessed his secret, and who used the knowledge to keep him (Ormsby) in his power to the day of his death.

When Belle was told this she breathed a prayer of heartfelt gratitude that her father's memory was cleared of the stain of homicide. That very evening, Death-Grip, or Mr. Richard Young, the famous member of the National Secret Service, called again to get his final answer to a most important question that he had asked repeatedly during the past six months.

"Dick," said the young girl, placing both her hands in his, "I can say yes, now, with the full knowledge that you will never be ashamed to hear the name of your wife's father."

"Ashamed! Well, that's a pretty thing for Belle Ormsby to say!" remarked Death-Grip, as he clasped her to his bosom.

On one of the highest peaks of the Rocky Mountains, where the soft air of Colorado's summer is insufficient to entirely melt its tippet of snow, is a small mound, carefully fenced in with boulders from the surrounding rocks. Though far above the usual paths of travel, the neatness with which the mound is kept, shows that a daughter's loving hands are not neglectful of the wind-swept grave of Old Secrecy.

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